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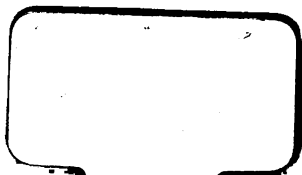
MARRIED AT LAST.

MISS M. DICKENS.





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## FOUR SCHOOLFELLOWS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE SCHOOLMASTER OF ALTON,”

“ROKE’S WIFE,” &c., &c.



# MARRIED AT LAST.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES:

BY

HELEN DICKENS

*Author of "The Mill-wheel," "Wild Wood," &c., &c.*

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# MARRIED AT LAST.

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## CHAPTER I.

I HAD been asleep an hour, perhaps more, when a scream, chilling from the horror and despair it conveyed to the hearer, awoke me.

I rushed into the corridor, too alarmed to form any idea of my purpose when there. A noise in Jocky's room decided me, and I knocked at the door, crying loudly at the same time for her to open it. I heard the glad sound of approaching footsteps springing up the stairs, and as Yorke came in sight, Jocky opened the door, and in an agony of terror flung herself into my arms, beseeching me not to let "him touch her."

The house was roused, people came bearing



lights. We formed the centre of attraction. Many were the entreaties, the commands, to tell what had happened. I was unable to ; Jocky refused.

She clung to me, white and silent, her night-dress torn from one shoulder, showing the soft flesh beneath. No attention did she pay to Yorke's accents of sympathy and tenderness, and when he would have taken her from my arms, she shrank from him as if he had been loathsome.

I bade him excuse her ; she had not recovered her terror, caused by what no one could divine. Nothing would she tell, we might conjecture anything.

The room was open to inspection, and its voiceless story was by no means a pleasant one.

The window was flung to the top, the bed fearfully disturbed, and on the pillow a handful of short, dark hair.

Yorke's face darkened horribly as he gazed.



Aunt's flushed, and she ordered the crowd back to their apartments.

Fortunately, aunt, Yorke, and I had alone entered the room. We had seen enough to render it desirable that no one else should follow our example.

"Charlotte, Isabel, return to bed. Disperse all of you, there is no cause for alarm. Miss Berdan has had one of her bad dreams."

This was a spontaneous invention of aunt's, born of necessity. But it sufficed. They returned to their respective apartments.

Jocky had crept into my room, and laid herself on the bed. Hardly knowing what I did, I followed her, and aunt me. I had never seen aunt so stern before.

She demanded an explanation from Jocky tartly.

"I will give no explanation, aunt. I can give none; but never again will I sleep in this house alone."

"You were frightened?"



"Yes."

"By some one entering your room?"

Jocky turned her face to the wall, and made no reply.

Aunt repeated her question, and, as before, received no answer.

Yorke broke the silence.

"Villain! I'll smash every bone in his body if I catch him."

He had heard the conversation from the door, where he had stationed himself.

His mother sprang forward, guessing his intention, but she was too late; he had gone. Her wrath now descended upon Jocky, the unhappy cause of any evil that might follow.

"Wretched, misguided girl, bitterly do I rue the day I permitted you to enter my house. Follow him, Penny; prevent him going out. There is no telling what may occur if they meet."

I hastened, but Yorke had gone, leaving the door open behind him. I called; no an-



swer. I strained my ears for cries of distress. Should I rouse the men servants, should I ring the alarm bell? No, replied prudence; wait.

I did so, shivering in the bitter night air, the snow falling on my head as I stood upon the door-step.

There was no sound. My heart beat thick. Was it all over? Was he lying dead in some corner? I was fainting, numbness was creeping over me, when my sinking senses were recalled by the sight of a figure coming towards me.

I called, "Yorke?"

The figure stopped. I called again, louder, "Yorke?"

It came forward quickly now.

"What is the matter, Penelope?"

It was only William. The presence of a human being roused me to fresh courage and other thoughts than my own drooping condition.



Hurriedly I explained why I was at the door, and entreated him to follow his brother.

“Do you know which way he went? Did you see him go?”

“No.”

“Then it is useless my setting out alone. To commence with, you do not know there is any person for him to follow, it may be a groundless alarm. Come in, I will see to Yorke. You are in no fit state to be standing here on such a night.”

He lifted me into the hall, and placed me by the fire. It was burning low in the grate. I glanced at the clock—three minutes to one.

“If you hear Yorke, let him in. I will be down directly.”

He hurried up stairs, and I set about replenishing the fire from the wood waggon hard by. My dressing-gown was wet where the snow had fallen on it, my slippers were soaking.

Five, ten minutes passed. What could be keeping William? Hark! he is coming now,



and not alone. Aunt accompanied him, almost wild with terror.

"Is Yorke not returned? Some harm has happened to him, William. Call Drysdale up. I shall go mad."

She reeled in her son's arms powerless to support herself, and dropped sobbing into an opportune chair. William looked the picture of distress.

"Rouse some one," said I.

"I will. I went for Thorne; he is not in his room."

The big woman rose majestically, one finger raised in warning, her face stiff with anger.

"Not there, you say. Then he——"

Some one stamping their feet on the steps stayed her utterance. I opened the door, and Yorke strode past me white from head to foot, the snow frozen on his wavy hair.

He was breathing fast like a cat, the lips were drawn to a straight line under the moustache. His mother rushed to him.



"You are safe, so I can bear anything, even this disgrace. Yorke, my son, forgive your mother for the consent she gave to your union with one who is unworthy of you. But, thank God, it is not too late to remedy."

He looked at her, his face expressing no consciousness of having understood her.

"What are you saying, mother?"

Her temper rose.

"I am not usually required to repeat what I may choose to say; manners are altering in various ways, it seems. This is what I say—Joan's visitor was Mr. Thorne!"

I expected a flash of anger, an indignant refusal, on Yorke's part, to credit the statement.

No sound escaped him. The stony face never changed, only the upper lip lifted in a sneer. It was a look of supreme contempt for all news and sympathy connected with the affair.

He walked to the fire and struck a log savagely, but uttered no word.

Things were assuming a strange, a terrify-



ing aspect. His mother now seemed aware of a peculiarity in his manner. It was no generous, sorrowful young fellow who had turned his back upon us, but a hard man, whom something had rapidly transformed into an austere, merciless creature, more possessed of hate than love.

Aunt addressed herself to the astonished William,—

“Explain to me where you parted from Mr. Thorne?”

“I did not part from him. He pleaded indisposition, and left Albert’s at half-past eleven. I supposed him to be in his room; I wonder if he has come in?”

“No,” replied Yorke, “he has not. I sat up to let you in; you are the first arrival through the door.”

“Yorke, I cannot permit you to infer anything so abominable about my friend. Thorne is an honourable man, incapable of such an action.”

“Three hours since I should have indorsed



your opinion, William ; now I cannot. Mr. Thorne gave me to understand his intentions were honourable towards dear Charlotte. This evening I learnt he had actually been to Yorkshire to see Joan. There is something extraordinary about the affair. I believe it has gone further than we have any knowledge of."

I could have told more, so could Yorke ; but he kept silent. He could have told that Thorne had proposed to Jocky, also that when she rushed from the room she entreated me not to let " him touch her."

What his silence was owing to I did not know. Mine was the result of a fixed belief that we were all labouring under a scandalous error, and I was determined to make no more mischief, for such all seemed to turn into. The devil was weaving a web of no ordinary design.

To believe Jocky capable of such conduct I was unable, and fearing my indignation might



master my prudence if I stayed amongst them, I made my escape.

Jocky was lying in precisely the same position as when I left her. She was awake; no tears dimmed her eyes, but her heart beat audibly.

She was suffering, silently, intense anguish of mind. I fastened the door, and took my place beside her before I spoke. Indeed I did not do that till I had cried. I was frightened and distressed for my friend. Unselfish in her own sorrow, she tried to comfort me, apologising for having caused me and others alarm.

“Never mind that, Jocky; that is not the worst. They have taken up the oddest notion of the affair, and to-morrow you must tell what frightened you.”

“They may say and think what their evil minds dictate, I shall not speak. It concerns me alone; I am the only sufferer, and I can bear their taunts.”



"Tell me," I pleaded.

"No; do not mention the subject again. This I say for your ears alone. When I screamed, I was in dire necessity, and for your ready response I shall bless you while I live. What does Yorke say?"

I hesitated before replying.

"Nothing."

"I understand; he has not taken my part, and he has not by speech condemned me. Prudent creature; he has silently embraced her belief. She is a bad woman, he is a paltry coward. Thank God, I shall soon be quit of both. Go to sleep."

I obeyed. It was useless trying to draw from her a fuller account of what had taken place.

She did not intend to tell. I slept, but awoke frequently. Every time I did so I found her awake.

She never closed her eyes all night. In the morning dark rings circled them, making them appear unnaturally large.



Her face was death-like in colour, when she got up she was unable to stand. Her head was all right, her body powerless. She was very ill.

Her illness bore out aunt's statement of her having a "bad dream." Very likely the servants believed she was subject to violent night-mare.

The only thing unaccountable was Mr. Thorne. He had not come in. The snow was thick; it had fallen steadily during the night; it continued to fall all day.

No search was instituted for Mr. Thorne, no mention was made of his absence. The household were given to understand it was due to some unexpected summons. His luggage was forwarded to his hotel. Aunt held the reins, and steered matters according to her judgment.

It was a stifling period; we were barricaded from the outer world by the snow, and from each other by a suspicion that



hourly gained ground as a conviction. Why should I play hide and seek with it longer? Why not say at once that Jocky was believed to have committed an unpardonable act. In short—she had received Travers Thorne in her bedroom.

I might embellish this portion of the story with the various opinions, the sundry scraps of evidence called to support this chaste impression—the stinging remarks, the insulting inferences which the miserable events connecting it seemed to produce. But it remains in my mind as a crushing reproof to hasty judgment, and the commencement of a fearful and irreparable error. I therefore hasten as much as I am able without tangling the thread of my story.

I can tell little of the family, having to spend much time with Jocky, who kept her room.

Late in the afternoon of the second day aunt came to speak with her.



Jocky was sitting in a chair by the fire, supported with pillows, looking so ill that I marvelled she did not rouse some compassion in the breast of Mrs. Sutherland.

That lady entered, richly attired, but neither kissed nor shook hands with her niece. Her manner stated more plainly than words could have done the change that had taken place in her feelings.

Joan had strayed from the right path; it was a disgrace to Ringley Royal. Her sin was of no consequence if hidden, their annoyance alone smarted, not her error.

Her fault was implied, rather than spoken, and from this mysterious handling it assumed a monstrous form that no reasoning could diminish.

I begged for a fair trial, a patient hearing. No; her misdemeanour was of such a nature that to make it the subject of conversation was impossible. The occurrence required no interpreter; it was clear to any one knowing



the facts. Had there been any mistake in the reading of it, Joan would have spoken. Her obstinate silence proclaimed beyond a doubt her guilt.

This was aunt's argument, and in the face of it I found myself unable to set up any defence. All that remained to be done was to send her away and forget her. To give the order to march was the purport of aunt's visit.

Her speech took a circuitous form, like that of all cowards.

"Joan, we have considered the matter carefully, regretfully, and we think the only course open, after what has transpired, the one most desirable and proper, if my daughters are to be considered, is to part. You may know where to seek shelter, very likely you do. This, however, will prevent you being hastened in your downward course by want."

She held a bank-note out to Jocky. The blood rushed into neck and face, then receding, left her whiter than before.



There was a pause as the poor girl obviously struggled to conquer her emotion. She dragged herself out of the chair, and steadying herself by the back, addressed the cruel woman.

"Madam, keep your money. I am an orphan, but neither a sinner nor a beggar. I am obliged to you, to your sons and daughters, for the consideration you have bestowed upon my case, and your decision is in accordance with your generosity. Your discernment is less than your severity, your evil ideas more than your good, your insolence enormous. You are in too great a hurry to aim accurately, therefore I am unhurt. I will leave your house as soon as I can persuade my limbs to obey my will. I would go now, but you would probably discharge the servant who carried me down stairs, and I had rather no one suffered on my account. I earnestly hope I may soon be stronger, and that this may be the last time I shall ever see you."



It was a peculiar speech, delivered in an extraordinary manner.

The girl was totally passionless, her last wish uttered in the mildest tone, her face was as tranquil as if she had been speaking of the weather.

Bowing, she reseated herself. The conference was ended, the action dismissed Mrs. Sutherland.

Astonished past all concealment, that lady's exit was an ordinary one. She stumbled over her dress, tried to open the door the wrong way, and when she reached her room had an hysterical fit.

Perhaps she fancied the dread of going out alone into the world would have a similar effect to the "thumb-screw"—make Jocky confess.

But in this, as in all else appertaining to her niece, she erred. Failing when she least expected, and feeling that she had been summarily dealt with by her niece, she proceeded



to lighten Jocky's impiety with a spark of her own virtue.

She called a council, she sighed, she wept behind a square of cambric and lace, she embraced her children, and told them Joan was "hardened." That was the sorest point of all. Had she evinced the least atom of repentance, there would have been room to hope. But, now—ah! well, her poor, poor mother!

Meanwhile, the child of the mother, who was getting sympathised with for what she never had appreciated, sat white and mute in her chair.

She accepted my sundry little attentions so sweetly, that at last I could stand it no longer, and I burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Jocky, why don't you cry? why don't you scold? Why are you so silent?"

She laughed softly.

"If I did the first two at once I should be



crazy, and I cannot do them separately because I am so tired. My heart has been in anguish so long it is too weak now to grieve aloud. I do not scold, because people have always done it for me. I do not speak because I want all the time to think."

"Where are you going to?"

"Where do castaways generally go to? Where they can get. First, out of sight; then to perdition. I wonder if I could secure any man's protection? I think I'll make my way to the barracks, and ask Colonel Clavel's. But I am not well-looking enough for a dishonest career; fate has done her best to protect me by giving me an ugly face. No; I shall not do for anybody's mistress. I might do for somebody's nurse. Not being a lady, of course I cannot be a governess. I am afraid I could not stand long enough to be a shop-girl, and I become faint if I kneel any time, so I cannot be a charwoman. I am a useless mortal, a sad drag to myself, and a



nuisance to others. I wonder what I *am* to do?"

The head dropped wearily.

"Jocky, why do you not tell the truth of your fright to aunt? It cannot be as they think."

"What is to hinder it? I must look the proper sort of person for such things, since they adopt the idea so readily. And, if you remember, my uncle hoped I would keep myself 'respectable.' There must be something amiss with my face. God knows my intentions are as pure as daylight."

She went to the glass, and looked in.

"I see nothing beautiful or bold. My face is the face of a woman in poor health. It has a pained look, as if from a nibbling disease; it is colourless. The mouth is drawn, the eyes are circled and harried in expression, every feature is of the commonest order. If I depend for my sustenance upon my beauty, I shall die from starvation."



"Jocky, hush! You know you could never be any one's inferior if you died for it."

"True; and those creatures are inferior, of course, generally by birth, always in position and intellect. I don't fancy my ability is below the usual standard, though, alas, I cannot play by the yard or shriek like an owl. Possibly, a barmaid's place might suit me. If they would accommodate me with a stool, I'd engage to give enough impudence to make the worst beer pass."

She laughed recklessly while the tears stood in her eyes.

Would they drive her to despair? Must her wildness force a passage through difficulties set by others, and compel people to recognise her power! Put to it, I knew she would stay at nothing, and the time might come when her relations' hasty judgment would prove a thorn in their conscience.

Joan Berdan was not after the most desirable pattern of woman; she was not



obedient or subservient. She was born to rule, not to be ruled, yet she readily recognised and obeyed her superior. Her fearlessness understood was a charm ; misunderstood, a danger.

So far she had been unfortunate in falling into the power of those who either took advantage of her endurance to heap cares upon her, or finding themselves sinking before this indomitable spirit, turned round and tyrannically trampled on it, hoping to kill what they could not conquer.

Whatever pangs they caused her, they never had the satisfaction of knowing it. Her sorrows were wrestled with in solitude, and, if not killed, crippled, so that they interfered little, to all appearance, with her life. Her eyes were sharp, her understanding keen.

“You are afraid of something, Penny ; is there a savage light in my eye ? I feel as if my little bit of civilisation was becoming awfully weak. I am certainly sliding back



into my normal condition, this treatment is sharpening every claw anew, and presently the hyæna within me will stand upright. Then let those who wrong me look to themselves ; it was only a sling David fought with, but he killed Goliath."



## CHAPTER II.

HER quotation suggested uncomfortable accidents to me, and, as usual, my specific for this gloomy malady was a brisk walk. I stepped out; the snow was deep and well crusted, the sky steeled blue; frost had set in severely.

I met the keepers taking food to the game, and reminded them of the white rabbits in the forsaken cock-pit.

I walked on till I encountered a man with a cart full of christmas, who asked me the hour.

It wanted five minutes to five. Not caring to be benighted, I quickened my steps, and all in a glow I reached home. I made a point



of giving as little trouble to the servants as possible, and always used the door in the court-yard, it being generally on the latch. This gave me a double sense of liberty. I resented strangely any custom or suggestion of restraint.

It was almost dusk when I entered the housekeeper's room, and found to my surprise no lamp had been lighted. I was aware of unusual sounds, a hum of voices quite novel; the old place was as busy as a hive of bees. Then shriek after shriek pealed forth, and I darted out.

The hall was full, all the servants, including Jabez, the head-keeper. The screams emanated from Charlotte, who was being carried upstairs by Drysdale and William in convulsions.

The white, scared faces turned to me excitedly. They besought me to "go in," Jabez indicating the direction with the handkerchief he was wiping his clammy face with.



Those standing round the billiard-room door parted to let me enter.

I did so, in a terrible state of horror. My fear was too dreadful to assume any definite shape.

The awe was too great for words, the silence was sickening. I could see nothing for people gathered round the table. Aunt stood with her face buried in her handkerchief.

It must be something serious to move her. Mustering all my courage, I thrust my face between the shoulders of Cook and Albert, and saw Travers Thorne laid on the table—dead!

Horror silenced me, and aunt wailed more than once, "Oh, Penelope!" before I took any notice.

When I looked up I beheld Jocky standing by William; he had just brought her in.

The eyes never flinched; supported by William's arm, she gazed in horror and re-



gret upon the dead man, but no conscious terror of any sort could be ascribed to her. A murmur escaped aunt, and drew from Jocky a retaliation that, simple in its utterance, was grand in its justification.

“You have wronged the living, you shall not wrong the dead. I swear, in the presence of this corpse, in the belief he is standing before the Judge that I must some day, that Travers Thorne had nothing to do with my alarm the other night. You injured him in thought, you have injured me in word and deed. He may have had nothing to forgive. I have, and I question whether I ever shall.”

“I cannot help that,” moaned aunt; “just consider the position we are in. There will be an inquest, and an exposure. It is awful!”

I drew Jocky away before she could reply. It was no fit scene for her or for me.

Aunt, selfish woman, had never said a truer



word; it was awful, but the extent of the horror was not immediately realised.

The doctor had not arrived, there was an examination of the body to be made, and enquiries as to the cause of death.

At present we believed it to be the result of a fall. He had been found by the keepers at the bottom of the cockpit. The surmise was that he had attempted a short cut from Albert's through the wilderness, and lost his way.

Dinner was an extraordinary farce; no one came to it but Eunice and I. William and Yorke had gone out on business, and we ate nothing, and started at every sound. The child looked beseechingly into the old butler's face as she asked—

“Drysedale, have you got the key?”

“Yes, Miss Eunice; the door is locked, and the key in my pocket till Dr. Wood or some one else comes.”

Jocky's dinner had been carried to her



room, and when I returned there I found it untouched.

I remonstrated, and received the usual reply, "I am not hungry."

She placed the lights as far back as possible, and drew her chair nearer the fire, but she did not talk, and at last I rose.

"Come back, and tell me what is said. Some one came half an hour ago."

I marvelled how she had managed to distinguish any sound. I could hear nothing but gusts of wind, and occasionally driving sleet.

It was a bitter night, full of sorrow and circling winds that sank and rose like wailing voices. To me, no sound was nameable but that of the elements ; she, from past experience and anxious watching, had learnt to separate and understand each noise that rose. From the drawing-room there came the sound of voices.

I entered. Dr. Wood, some strange men,



aunt, William, and Yorke were there. They scarcely noticed me, and I listened to the conversation.

When the men had finished, aunt, possibly feeling I might be misled by their somewhat mystifying expressions, told me the meaning of it all in plain language.

“Penelope, they say Mr. Thorne has been murdered, that there are finger-marks on his throat, and one wrist is broken.—I should like to see you before you go, Dr. Wood; I feel very ill.”

I also felt ill, and the tears rolled down my face in spite of my efforts. The village policeman began to sympathise with “Miss,” and at the same time gather every grain of information I might let slip. I stopped the man abruptly, and left the room.

Death at any time is a shock, but a violent death is robbed of all balm by its accompanying horror. I pictured how the poor fellow had fought for his life out in the night, and



lost it. I wondered if he was dead when thrown in amongst the rabbits, or had he been hours in agony.

By this time I had subsided into a paroxysm of weeping, and sought shelter in the house-keeper's room. Soon I felt the pressure of a hand on my shoulder.

Yorke bent over me, his white lips striving to smile as he uttered words of sympathy for my distress.

"You should not have been told so suddenly, Penny; the first shock was sufficient to unnerve you. How does *she* bear it?"

"Jocky, you mean? Quietly, as she would bear anything. But she does not know yet that he was strangled. Don't you follow in the wicked, false track. She cared no more for Mr. Thorne than I did. You are not base enough, after hearing her swear this afternoon, to suppose anything contrary.

"Jocky is a girl of strong but repressed feelings; it requires something more than or-



dinary to bring them to the fore. Her disclosure was made out of duty to the dead. Had he lived we should never have known he was not the cause of the alarm. You were all too ready to judge evil of him and her, or perhaps he might have been saved. It was this erroneous notion that prevented him being sought after. There is blame to be attached to us all; he should not have been left to his fate. Wait till the public give their opinion. You will be censured for not seeking a missing guest. Common humanity ought to have suggested the measure."

"You forget, I did go."

"And came back no wiser than you went."

He made no reply. His silence irritated me, and I began to reproach him.

"You are a selfish coward. Had you found a man on the door-step you would have brained him with the scraper, and thought you had done something commendable. But



a poor fellow being murdered might scream for an hour, and you would not go to his assistance because it was out of your way."

"How do you know he screamed?" asked he, quickly.

"I don't 'know.' I only 'suppose.'"

"Supposition is an unwise thing to indulge in."

"Pity *you* did not recollect that ten days ago. Will you come up with me, and tell the truth? Your jealousy and temper may be distressing when they rise, but they are nothing compared to the honest indignation she is capable of showing. She has endured her own wrong, but Heaven defend us if she determines to avenge his murder."

"If she does not love him, why should she trouble to find his murderer?"

"How can I tell, unless to spite you."

He staggered like a drunken man, and I passed him. I was so perfectly upset that I



made a very lame attempt at preparation, if any.

Jocky grasped my meaning directly, and insisted on my repeating the report word for word as I heard it. There was something that followed not very clear to my mind, when I became composed enough to observe truthfully she was—praying. Her arms stretched up between the candles, a look of agony on her face such as I have never seen on that of any human being since, the words and tears flowing together.

She prayed fiercely—not for herself, for the dead man—in a tumult of horror and haste heartrending to witness. She almost commanded—

“God punish me, and forgive him. Hurried to his death through the evil passions of another, whom Thou hast chosen to associate with me; he could not repent, therefore his sins must be shared. Lord, let me bear them, and give my life for his——”



I placed my hand over her mouth.

“Jocky, you are mad. What can his death have to do with you?”

“Never mind, it has; that is enough—enough for you to know, enough to mar my life in the future. Never again will I ask shelter in any one’s home. I will live alone; I will keep apart, out of the friendship, the thoughts of every creature. Then the evil will not be tempted to touch any one save me.”

I tried to soothe her, she repulsed me sadly but firmly. She was putting her resolution into practice.

Tears came to my aid, and I commenced to weep vigorously. She took no notice of me, but with a countenance full of determination, she set about eating the dinner I had carried up three hours before. She ate and drank without appearing to have any knowledge of what she partook.

It was the first food she had touched for



more than two days. Then she bade me good night, kissed me at the door, and locked it.

I was so tired, I fell asleep speedily, and must have slept some time when the creaking of a door roused me. I fell asleep again, and slept till morning ; when I went to call Jocky, she had gone !

The room was neat, Jocky's order amounted to preciseness. Her things were packed, and a note stood on the dressing-table directed to " Penny."

I opened it. It was no incoherent epistle, damp with the writer's tears, but a short graphic letter such as Jocky always wrote, and for which some people censured her. Possibly it was abrupt, and assuredly un-womanlike in its conciseness, but she possessed the faculty of summoning her senses to bear upon one point at a time. About her and all she did there was a striking completeness.



"DEAR PENNY, .

"I am going—not to commit suicide, but to catch the midnight express. I shall purposely make myself remembered at the station, so that if you inquire you will learn whether I caught it. The snow is deep, and the way long, but I know I can manage it, and as 'improper characters' generally sneak out of honest society, my departure is not remarkable. Tell Mrs. Sutherland not to provoke the dead by calumny. Of *me* she can say what her vile conscience prompts. Kindly send my luggage to Crag House as early as convenient, and

"Believe me, dear Penny,

"Yours sincerely,

"JOCKY."

I realised the fact that she had gone, perhaps for ever, certainly till chance enabled me to find her, with an alacrity and bitterness I cannot describe. I had never possessed a



sister, and Jocky had awakened in me an affection as strong as it was unusual. Of course she would catch the express. Had she not eaten to be fortified, and she no doubt set off in plenty of time.

She was a woman of resource and calculation, not a gushing girl to run for the first mile, and then faint. I waited till they were all assembled at breakfast, and then told the news.

Aunt turned scarlet, Yorke white, the others raised their eyebrows, and Eunice wailed aloud. She liked Jocky.

"I shall send to the station," announced aunt. "But I hope they did not recognise her there."

"Most likely not; she has altered of late, especially within the last few days, and I am sure she would not mention *you*."

With that I handed the note. The next moment it fluttered on the tray in atoms. For once aunt was ashamed, nay afraid.



Respecting the murder and inquest, I shall condense.

The latter took place in proper form. I kept out of the way ; I was confined to my room ill. I grieved for Jocky, and I suffered from severe cold, caught, doubtless, standing on the door-steps.

They managed to dress the calamity up so prettily that people called, and sent cards to condole with aunt and her family. They went into complimentary mourning for the poor fellow, and William departed in genuine sorrow.

Charlotte's nerves were in so shattered a condition that aunt took her to Hastings by the advice of the family doctor, who knew what he was about.

I have no hesitation in saying it was sham. I never gave Charlotte Sutherland credit for one particle of thought or affection for any one but herself.

However, it was pretty and fashionable to have "nerves" and "droopings," so she had



them, and took them and her wardrobe to Hastings.

Isabel and Eunice went to stay with some friends, I remained to be answerable for the house and its valuables. My leisure time I employed writing letters to Jocky at "Crag House," so full of tenderness that most women would have been melted, though they did not emanate from a man.

But I might as well have poured out my affection to a mound in the church-yard; no reply did my eloquence elicit, and at length I stopped.

Her luggage I had despatched as she requested to her desolate home, and I concluded she received it. I had, however, no intimation to that effect.

Finally, I believed she was out in the world somewhere, full of ambition and honesty of purpose, and I asked daily that a blessing so truly deserved might be granted her, and that ultimately we might meet.



Yorke was at home, but he shut himself up somewhere, and I saw little of him. We did not even meet at meals. I had mine in the housekeeper's room, he took his generally after the appointed hour in the library.

I was busier dusting than usual one day when I heard that a gentleman particularly desired to see me.

It was Colonel Clavel, booted and spurred, and redder than ever. He had ridden over to see *me*, to learn from me Jocky's whereabouts.

My ignorance surprised him, and when I begged him to make some inquiries, and acquaint me with the result, he seemed satisfied it was not feigned.

"Do you mean to say no one knows where she is, Miss Gedise?"

"To the best of my belief that is the case."

"I thought Yorke was engaged to her. How could he let her go?"



His hand gripped his whip as though he would have enjoyed laying it on Yorke's back.

"They disagreed, and broke it off. The affair with Mr. Thorne gave rise to unpleasant ideas, and Jocky is much too high-spirited to put up with anything of the kind. I need not say more than that; in every sense it is unfortunate."

He nodded.

"I understand. I only wish I could see her again, judge for myself whether she wants for anything, hear from her own lips a few home-thrusts that carry with them all the weight and none of the bitterness. Men will remember her, no one will ever feel offended, many grateful. The man or woman who refuses the love or friendship of Miss Berdan is worse than a fool. I could have loved her if she would have let me, and made her happy. I daresay you think I am an old idiot, Miss Gedise. Good-bye!"



He returned to his regiment, I to my cleaning, each confident that she whom we sought was not after the ordinary manner of young women.



## CHAPTER III.

THERE came a change to Yorke. He saddened visibly, his books lost their charm. When he preferred solitude now, it was not to read, but to brood with wearied face on the past, till deep furrows crossed his brow, and the light died in his eyes. He suffered, and he could not do it silently. The tears would rise to his eyes, and roll out, no effort being made to repress them.

For me he minded nothing, and his childish grief had full scope during the absence of the others.

I am afraid I did not sympathise as I might have done, but to my mind the repentance



that comes too late must be sorely needed. His life had been too smooth, he had not been required to make many sacrifices, and the weak, faulty points in his character had remained concealed.

I now perceived that when his self-vanity was hurt he might become cruel. He was afraid of being ridiculed. The fault is not uncommon, or a very serious one. No doubt it had been nursed into existence by the home homage he received.

Jocky had, as he thought, slighted his importance, trifled with him, and he was offended. His displeasure had not worn off when she had gone, and he repented of his conduct.

They were all sorry and ashamed when the mischief was done, the girl gone no one knew where, and the man dead. To be sure they gave Mr. Thorne a resting-place in the churchyard amongst the refined dust of their ancestors, and a marble monument with his



name inscribed thereon in gold letters. But all this did nothing towards repairing the wrong, or protecting the slandered orphan from misery in the future.

Yorke had been cruel ; had he forgiven—supposing there had been need of forgiveness—the act would have done him credit. But he forgot mercy in anger, and now remorse claimed him, and I would not have deprived her of one payment.

Let him suffer, it was what his people had made her do. If ever Jocky did meet him again, she would find his judgment tempered to the necessity of others, his mind nearer her own standard, and more capable of appreciating her.

He was a favourite of mine, and though I liked to see his suffering, because I foresaw the good it would do, I had no mind that others should see it too. He was, for a wonder, taking tea with me, and if not crying, the next thing to it.



I could not get him to speak, or offer me anything to eat. I regarded him attentively, and noticed how much he had altered. He was thinner, and the mouth had a harder curve, quite unlike the usual smile. His expression was haunted, haggard, distressing to behold.

"Yorke, I wish you would rouse yourself; people will say you are going daft."

"So I am. If this state of things lasts much longer I *shall* go mad. Penny, do you know where she is?"

"No, I do not. Why don't you try to find her, though I warn you, she will not thank you for your trouble, and certainly not come back."

"I have tried, and she cannot be traced: Crag House has only the servant in it."

"Oh, so you value now what you silently condemned and scorned before. It is a pity you allowed yourself to be influenced by a woman. Women have the name of being hard on one



another, and assuredly your mother did make Jocky's misdemeanour as terrible as it was possible. You made a stupid, despicable mistake, and your best course now is to bear the consequences quietly."

"It is foolish to go moaning about because you have lost your love."

"Who says I have lost her? I tell you I will find her if I travel over the world, and my goodness to her in the future shall atone for my sin in the past."

He sprang up and paced the room excitedly. I waited till he should be calmer. He might have sinned against Jocky in thought, he had not in word or deed. He had kept aloof from all conference on the subject.

I failed to understand his precise sin. I wondered whether he was going mad.

"Do you think you can sit down and propose any plan to benefit you?"

He threw himself into the chair again.



"I fancy going abroad; change of scene might perhaps bring change of thought."

"Perhaps; if not you would have spared yourself the humiliation of weeping before your family. Go, by all means, and as early as possible. I am tired of your whining."

He made no response, and I began to feel sorry for him. His indifference also made me uneasy. The hardest things I said had no effect upon him. He began to roam about the room murmuring, "God forgive me," till my displeasure vanished, and I sought to soothe. In the end he cried like a baby, and I joined him.

When he tried to give me an idea of his love, I discovered how immeasurable it was.

I then sketched him Jocky's home life, which, in my opinion, accounted excellently for her peculiarities and strange character. The truth flashed upon him. He had misunderstood many things, and hastily believed



them faults or illustrations of negligence on her part.

Now he upbraided me stoutly for not having spoken earlier, and I let the storm rage. It was a healthier state than his former one of melancholy.

It seemed a satisfaction to lay a share of the blame on my shoulders, though I could not see that I had any part in the proceeding. The next morning he informed me he was going abroad at once, and I pledged myself to have all in readiness for the following day. I had; and he went, promising to write his mother an explanatory letter.

The epistle must have been a failure, for on the Saturday she arrived to take leave of her darling, and it was some time ere I could convince her he had gone. She cried and raved till her face was crimson, then she went to bed ill, and Dr. Wood pronounced it "prostration of the nervous system."

For some time my life was a hard one.



Yorke was in Italy, and gave no hope of a speedy return. We lived a depressed life at Ringley Royal.

Isabel and Charlotte spent much time visiting. Eunice and I waded through histories, and learnt Heller.

William avoided home, and Mr. and Mrs. Albert found some extra charm within their homestead. The truth was aunt's temper was not so sweet as formerly, and, when a frenzy of despair possessed her, she considered no one.

"If Yorke would only come back," that was her constant cry.

Jocky she called a "witch," a "sorceress." Her son had never been right since that girl set foot in the house.

She even unbent so far as to try and discover the whereabouts of her niece, and, like those who had attempted before her, she failed.

One question haunted me. "Where had Jocky gone?"



Wherever she was, I knew she was respected and beloved. But was her brave heart never lonely? Were the sad eyes never sadder? If I could only see!

My feeling was not unlike the yearning of some heart for one it has loved and lost; who has been torn, struggling and gasping from their presence, and borne into that unfathomable depth—death. There is the wild seeking that racks the nerves intolerably, the misery of never finding what is sought, the unceasing desire to behold the lost one's place in the marvellous kingdom. Say not this wish is sinful. I know it. But vast, indeed, is the faith that can banish dark moments.

On the first of April an announcement was made. Isabel was engaged, and hardly had we recovered this shock, than there came another. She was to be married. Yes, all in a hurry—immediately. Excitement is stimulating, and so it proved in aunt's case. She rose like a ship in a storm, and rode over



the waves. She had one hope realised at last. Isabel was going to marry Sir Henry Templeton, and if her temper did not bring his already apoplectic symptoms to a climax, port would. She, however, would be Lady Templeton, and able to rise higher in the social scale. Soothing reflection! Under it aunt's recovery was rapid, and more young people were drafted from London to assist in stitching the wedding garments.

Aunt wrote to Yorke, and besought his presence at the ceremony. He responded in the course of time, promising to attend.

The sixteenth was a glorious day, spring flowers and sunshine helped to render the scene pleasing and hopeful, and the small world, of which the bridal party formed the centre, turned out to witness the giving in marriage of Isabel Marion Sutherland.

Yorke had arrived the night before. His face had lost much of the youthful charm, and in its stead there was a thoughtful, sad



expression. He had travelled far, and sojourned with searchers after art and science. Something of an enthusiastic spirit had been infused into him, swamping many of his crude theories. He took the earliest opportunity of asking me whether there was any news. I was busy cutting tongue papers.

“No, all is as silent as the grave. Are you still dreaming the old dream, have no foreign beauties superseded her?”

“No, and I am still dreaming and wishing it were reality. My love is my only hope of Heaven. I have been steeped to the brow in dissipation and folly. I have tried to believe passion love, and blue eyes and black eyes have each palled upon me, and in turn been made over to some other fool. I have done all this, I have sinned against my conscience, striving to forget, and I have but succeeded in doing one thing—in discovering that every better feeling, every indication of hope, is reflected from her. As surely as there is a



directing hand, so surely are we necessary one to the other."

He turned from me, hiding his face. I was mute.

These arguments might be impressive, were they sound? How odd that the knowledge of the necessity should only come after the loss. He happened to look at me.

"Penny, you are ridiculing me, you do not believe me?"

"Be patient. I am exerting myself to do so. Please remember I have no imagination, I am only an ordinary mortal, and it seems somewhat odd that a late conviction should have more power over you than the working of your own senses."

Possibly he would have replied had I not been summoned by the cook to a conference. He was perched on the edge of the table when I returned.

"I suppose you feel properly stabastical?"

"No."



"I think you do, and by Jove you can give a dressing. Why don't you say at once, 'Yorke, you are a fool?'"

"Because I do not consider your present frame of mind warrants such an epitaph. To my way of thinking these are your sane moments. I only regret reason has arrived too late to secure happiness."

"You consider her lost?"

"I am not positive, there are queer twists in the line of fate. Some of the sparks darting out of your eyes may attract her. Believing it possible that event may occur, I advise you to employ the intermediate time in learning how to treat her."

He bounded out of the room in a rage. I was satisfied. I had accomplished my purpose. I had lashed him into a fury, and raving any day were more preferable than pining.

The wedding was tedious, extravagant, overpowering, and I hailed with delight the arrival of the carriage to take the happy pair



to the station. The departure was suitably bewildering. The horses fidgeted, people laughed and cried.

The bride and bridegroom, the latter more purple-nosed than ever, were boxed up in the first carriage, the lady's maid and valet in the second, in imminent danger from the piles of luggage on the top. The excitement was too great to last long; gradually the company thinned, and the house became reasonably silent. Those remaining betook themselves to their former occupations. Yorke stopped; accordingly aunt's spirits and good temper remained.

I managed the housekeeping, and heard Eunice her lessons. She grew rapidly a kind-hearted girl, charmingly original. I considered we were all doing remarkably well, when Charlotte thought it about time she came into notice, and therefore ceased eating. Aunt's fears sprang up at a moment's warning, full grown, gigantic.



“Dear Charlotte was in galloping consumption; did I not think so?”

“No, I did not. Charlotte had not much the matter with her, but she had better go away for change.”

My suggestion was acted upon. Aunt and Charlotte were packed, and started for Marwood Manor to welcome Sir Henry and Lady Templeton: and Eunice, Yorke, and I were left to direct home affairs. That was a refreshing time; we talked, walked, and laughed without restraint, and Yorke thawed.



## CHAPTER IV.

THE wind blew from the east, and Eunice took influenza so violently as to be obliged to keep her bed. She was sleeping; I made the fire up and went down stairs for supper and fresh air.

The housekeeper's room was warm and bright. Sarah had trimmed the lamps, and spread the table. The rain beat against the curtainless window, the wind howled, and I thought of my miserable life under Mrs. Sourlander's roof. It was a wild night, each element struggling for supremacy, and failing; there was a harrowing discord. The night was full of sounds that carried with them painful recollections.



In imagination I saw "Crag House" standing exposed to blast and hail on the moor's edge. It stood strong and solitary, shorn of every leaf and friend.

Its condition was similar to its mistress's—Desolate, she had a corner in the great world—somewhere. The stranger would detect no love, no yearning in the hard-faced woman who held her ground unaided. Whatever she suffered she would make no sign, and people would decry her for standing under difficulties that would have crushed others into the slough of despair.

The door opened, the wind rushed in. I turned to ascertain the cause, the latch was generally reliable. It had been lifted by a country-woman, cloaked and hooded, with a basket on her arm. She courtsied.

"I've lost my road; can you tell me the way to the village, ma'am, hoping you will pardon the liberty?"

A gray lock of hair hung over her brow, a

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tired expression was on her countenance. I bade her approach the fire and rest.

"Have you walked far, may I ask?"

"Yes, my lady, many miles, and the night is hard on travellers."

Her gaze wandered round the room eagerly.

"Are you living near here?"

"I am dairy-woman at 'The Grange.'"

She now peered into my face and said—

"You have a pleasant manner to a poor body, not haughty, like I should have supposed the lady of this big house would be."

I smiled.

"I am not the lady. I am the governess-housekeeper, if you happen to know what manner of creature that is. Mrs. Sutherland is from home."

"Then I am in luck's way for once."

The hood was pushed back, the wig with it, and I recognised—Jocky.

She enjoyed my amazement.

"Is not this disguise capital? I dare face



all the family, after fooling you so completely. Haven't you a kiss for me, or are you desirous of knowing first whether I am respectable?"

"Hush!" sobbed I in delight. "I'll kiss you twenty times, readily, only pull off these things, then you will look something like yourself."

She arrested my fingers, busy with the fastenings.

"Are you alone here, Penny, only the servants?"

"No, Yorke, and—"

"Stop, that is sufficient. That name is enough to drive me into the ocean, if there were no other means of avoiding its owner. I shall not stay."

"O, Jocky, if you only knew how he loves you."

"I know, my heart is sad with beating in response. Do you think I do not love him? If you could only make your thought my reality, I would bless you for ever."



She moved. I caught her cloak.

"Stay, he will not recognise you any more than I did. Stay, I will say I asked you to shelter awhile."

She laughed, the old musical laugh. It sounded odd from beneath the market-woman's hood.

"You do not care for me as he does, Penny. You may dissemble before all the world, but the man that loves you will find you out. I could not act to Yorke, how could I bear to see him. There is a *murder* between us. Separation is our only chance, unity would rouse the dead out of his grave yonder. I have come through the church yard. He rests quietly beneath the soaking clods. They have raised a costly stone to mark the place, but it cannot atone for the crime. For the life that was taken a life must be given. Not the breath of it, laid still and low, it could avail nothing. It must be the thought, purpose, power, of a life devoted to accom-



plishing something to his glory, that shall keep its place in the memory, when the rain of years has washed the gold off his tombstone."

The storm raged higher, like voices it clamoured at the casement. Then came the faint clatter of dishes.

"Hark! there is some one outside. It is Yorke; hide me."

I heard nothing, but the incessant patter of rain.

She sprang to a closet, and crept in amongst the jars and packages. The door was hardly closed, before Yorke entered, dripping. He stamped and shook himself, making pools of water on the hearth.

"This is the worst night this season; the wind is enough to cut off a fellow's nose. Have I any eye-lashes left?"

"Numbers."

"Halloa! what has made you so white, Penny?"



I was alarmed now into turning red.

"Am I whiter than usual? It is the cold, probably. Had you not better take your wet things off?"

"Yes. Summons one of your handmaidens to wait upon me."

I rang, and Sarah came. "Supper is not quite ready, Miss Gedise."

"Who asked for supper? Bring me slippers and a coat, and carry off these sopping things."

My heart sank, he did not intend to leave the room.

The next action was to place a chair by the fire. The blaze shone directly on his face.

I saw the closet door open, and the blood trickled out of my cheeks again. I stood between them. I fancied I could see the gleam of her eyes in the darkness. I dashed into a conversation.

"Where have you been to?"

"The village, and I had it all to myself. There's not a dog out to-night."



“What made you go?”

“The horrors of reflection. I could endure my own thoughts no longer, so I went out. But they followed me into the storm. There’s a voice in the air to-night, Penny. It kept whispering to me all the way, and I could not catch what it said. Destiny is hard, she stands between us, a sneer on her grim visage. Damned hag; but you cannot fetter the spirit, do what you will with the body. That will fly, and rest where it listeth. O, my love, come again, come again!”

His face worked, his arms were outstretched. He saw what I could not. While he gazed his countenance suggested both pleasure and pain.

Supper was brought in. I invited him to eat, he hardly appeared to understand me, and when I pressed the subject, he became irritable.

“Get your own supper, and leave me alone. You will scare her with your chatter. Hush!



there is the whispering. She is near, nearer than she has been since we parted. If only she would stay."

My heart throbbed. Superstition rose, and beckoned to me.

"Begone," commented I, "this is no work of yours. Here is connexion through intensity of thought, a phantom longing has mercifully created to ward off despair!"

He listened. The wind moaned in the plantation. Stillness was creeping into the night. He breathed heavily, he was falling asleep. An hour passed, the logs fell apart, he did not move, he was sound asleep.

I turned to the closet, Jocky came forth. Her cheeks were wet with tears.

"Do not check me, Penny, he is too fast asleep to make it dangerous."

She kissed him. She kissed me.

"Good by, Penny; be kind to him when you can. May God help him, I don't see how else he is to be helped, poor fellow. I



may come again, if I see you are alone, as I did to-night."

"Jocky," I whispered, "give me your address; let me hear from you?"

"No, no, it is better not; you must trust to Providence for another meeting."

I clung to her. She gently, but firmly, disengaged my hands, and passed out into the darkness. Then I wept scalding tears of disappointment and regret, while Yorke slept and dreamt before the fire.

Had we been alone, she would have told me something about herself. Now I could only conjecture from her face that her life was a toilsome one. Where, and how did she live? her own money could not keep her.

My nerve was shaken, and I strove to steady it by eating some supper, to which I once more invited Yorke, and with no better success. His sleep was unnaturally sound, it seemed as if he could not rouse. At last I left him, and sought rest myself.



The following morning was wild and wet. Yorke marched out, regardless of the weather. He was so engaged with his own thoughts that he cared not for society. This peculiar visionary fit lasted three days, and in the third night I had a revelation.

The moon was full when I awoke, and obeying impulse rather than reason, I rose and looked through the casement. The bare trees afforded no concealment, and pacing to and fro in the church yard, I saw a man. Height, figure, all corresponded—it was Yorke. I saw him lift his hatless head, as if speaking to some one. The action impressed me strongly, I opened the window and listened. The keen air blew in, and with it a cry of intolerable anguish.

“Jocky, forgive me ; God have mercy upon me !”

The night wind whistled about my ears, the man continued to wander amongst the dead, and my eyes were fastened on hiero-



glyphics that ran zigzag across the moonlit wall, and which I translated thus.

“Yorke Sutherland murdered Travers Thorne.”

I longed feverishly for morning. To be alone with this horror was too much for me. I strove to shatter the notion by showing proof of his innocence. And I could not. Circumstances tallied so strangely, that I only marvelled how I had escaped thinking of it so long. He had gone in quest of the man; his manner was odd when he returned. How ready memory was to reproduce every look and word. I was tortured almost past endurance. Desire said he is “innocent,” reason, “guilty.” As though to cover his vile sin, snow had fallen the entire night, and effectually obliterated all footprints. Had not Jocky said a “murder” stood between them. Her conduct, his conduct, all pointed to the same terrible conclusion. He had killed Travers Thorne, and Jocky knew it!



Heaven help us all, and grant me strength to keep the awful knowledge to myself. It was not my duty to tell of my kinsman, it could not be expected of me. Justice might find another agent, she should never have me.

I struggled on silently, great waves of horror sweeping over me from time to time, and robbing me of courage and spirits. I was drooping beneath the weight I was forced to carry alone. If I could only have told some one. People noticed the change, and my aunt was remarkably kind in setting the doctor to work to discover my complaint. He failed. I thought it probable he had never had one like it before, and thanked Providence it was not under the gaze of Dr. Brierly I was required to stand, or I should not have come off so victorious. He had an awkward habit of putting startling questions, and reaching the truth, let it be hidden ever so cleverly.

It was proposed that Eunice and I should go to Paris for a few months with Yorke. I stoutly



refused, and he did not press the matter, indeed, he half excused me to his mother.

"Penny prefers remaining at home, so let Charlotte go in her stead."

This plan did not suit aunt; perhaps she defined with a mother's instinct that Charlotte's delicate fingers possessed claws like most women's, and that she could use them if crossed by her captivating young sister. It ended in Yorke going alone, and I rallied when he had gone. The sight of him kept the horror constantly in my mind. I shrank when he approached me, I recoiled from him almost visibly. If he had not departed, I should.

Jocky's visit was like a dream, she had come and gone, leaving no trace. I was groping on betwixt terror and anxiety, when Jack Sutherland returned.

There were no festivities, no preparation. Aunt welcomed him as a necessary evil, and made no attempt at rejoicing.



## CHAPTER V.

JACK had been abroad many years, and belonged to the elder branch of the family. He and his father did not agree too well, and the stern parent procured him an appointment in India. Directly he arrived, there was something said about his peculiar ways, and, as if in confirmation of this statement, he kept his room ten days, though he declared he was not ill, and his servant had a hard time of it, if one might judge by the number of journeys he made up stairs.

A sudden gust of wind extinguished my candle before I reached my room, and I stayed to light it in the corridor. I could not reach, and heaved a disappointed sigh. Im-



mediately two iron hands clasped my waist, and I was raised to a level with the bracket.

"Put me down directly, whoever you are," cried I, indignantly.

"Light your candle," was the cool response.

There was no unsteadiness, my position was secure, my tormenter as strong as Hercules. I thought it possible I might be suspended in the air twenty minutes, so I lighted the dip, and was immediately lowered to the ground.

I was disconcerted, doubly so when I observed my giant to be smiling provokingly at me. The face was hard, but not unpleasant, and a bristly beard and moustache added to its ferocity. This brigandish individual was attired in a gorgeous Turkish dressing-gown, slippers, and cap. It might be a prince out of the "Arabian Nights," in whose fortunes I had been so interested when a child. I gazed at him. There came an interruption.

A black face appeared from an adjacent doorway.



“ Massa ? ”

“ Go to the devil,” was the awful rejoinder.

The head was tucked in.

“ Hang that fellow ; there never is an impressive moment that he does not scatter sentiment to the winds with a ‘ Massa.’ When I want to propose, I shall have to bolt the window and lock the door. And I wonder what my adorable would think of that. Can you tell me, young lady ? ”

“ No, sir, I have never been the object of a madman’s attentions.”

“ Eh ! madman indeed, do you think I look like one ? ”

“ Before answering that question, I must be better acquainted with insanity. Meanwhile I refrain from contradiction or endorsement. Appearances are so deceptive. Will you allow me to pass ? ”

“ No, it’s my turn now. Who are you with your smooth face and sharp tongue ? I find you promenading the house when its



other inmates are asleep, wearied in body, brisk in spirit. You come along softly and meekly till accosted, then—”

Here the black head appeared again, and this time the answer to “Massa” was a dash made at the offender by the enraged gentleman. In the confusion I escaped.

“That,” soliloquised I, having secured the door—“can only be Jack, they may well call him peculiar.”

His peculiarities, however, improved upon acquaintance, and when he had been a month in the house, I had promised to marry him.

Yes, reader, my courtship was similar to my life, unromantic, with little tenderness in it. I cared not for protestations, and I did not get them. Sometimes I was swung round in his strong arms, and my feeble efforts at extrication laughed at. We loved in an old fashioned, real manner; we did not sit hand in hand, or embrace behind doors.



The error of cousins marrying was quite overlooked, in the joy of getting Jack settled in life and me provided for.

"You know, Penelope, very few would have Jack with his Indian crotchets, and that terrible black man, that no one can ever hear approaching, and you are poor and not prepossessing, and looking wretched just now. So you cannot find much fault with each other. He is very fond of you, and I think you have every prospect of happiness."

Such was aunt's address.

Jack roared when I related it, and carried me twice round the room in triumph.

"I am glad I did come home to take you out of the trap, poor little mouse. When you were old and unable to tell currants from raisins, you would not have found favour with Madam Sutherland.

"We'll set up a little home of our own, and be merciful to each other's infirmities and failings."



The "little home," was in the pretty village of Fetcham, Surrey, and I went to it on the 12th of July, 18—. In my happiness there was but one flaw, Jocky and Yorke. They were one to me, yet the same thought was not given to both.

The one I hoped I might see again, the other I prayed I should never encounter. At one time it was no improbable thing, for Jack expected to return to India, and then I knew we were safe from Yorke. But it was decided that we remained in old England. Here was a grand opportunity for me to have made a heroine of myself, and I let it pass.

I did not refuse Jack because I believed his brother a murderer; I did not break faith with him, and go into a decline myself, when I found we were to share the same climate.

I resolved never to mention the idea to any one, to forget it myself, and to marry



Jack whom I loved, and be to him a good wife. I know it was more practical than romantic, more mercenary than high minded. But I had lost any early taste I might have had for colouring, and learnt to value the comforts of a home, and the protection of a strong arm. A lone woman stands a poor chance in the world.

Eunice regretted my departure. I had become something more to her than her governess.

It was so new to me to be loved, to be pleasant in the eyes of some one, that I plucked up amazingly, and dismissed much of my wan appearance.

It was hardly clear to the minds of the good people, how I had contrived to captivate handsome Jack. He affirmed, when questioned, that my impudence had done the trick.

I did not seek to unravel the mystery ; I was content to love, and be loved.



I shall skip over my wedding ; it was not a brilliant affair, there were neither bridesmaids nor cake, therefore of no vital interest to any one.

Our composed manner and quiet habits gave the inhabitants of Fetcham the impression we were old married people, and my experience in household management prevented any blunders occurring to enlighten them. It was only when my boy was born, that delighted Dandy took upon himself to chatter, and say that little " Massa " was the first. Nothing pleased him more than to nurse baby, and none could do it better. The nurse (who had a goodly assortment of airs) expressed herself astonished that I should allow the black man to kiss my baby, and some lady in the neighbourhood mentioned the circumstance of having met Mrs. Sutherland's baby out with the black servant *alone*. Perhaps she fancied he might bite it, but I knew who loved it loyally, and screened



it from sun and wind, as if he dreaded losing his new treasure.

My baby gained strength, I did not. I began to droop and kick against the dull life in the Surrey village.

Frank was a year old, able to be left, and I craved to visit town. My husband would have taken me to Iceland if I had asked it, and ere many days passed we were installed at the Langham.

It was the season; excitement, extravagance, pleasure, were at the height, and we having entered the whirl, found it difficult to draw out. On every blank wall there was an announcement—"Miss Thorne."

"Who is she?" enquired I.

"The new actress; you must see her. She has made a great name, and is at present quite the rage."

I turned my thoughts to other matters, and when, one night, we were rolling along, I only knew we were going to some Theatre. The



house was crammed; wherever you turned, eager, expectant faces met your gaze. We reached our box at last, and, after a final scrutiny, I asked—

“Jack, who acts here, there is hardly space enough left to breathe.”

He laughed.

“No; and if the house were twice the size it would be filled. This is my third visit. Miss Thorne is the finest actress England has had for years.”

The orchestra had been giving its customary twirls and blasts; it now concluded with a crash.

The hum ceased. Noble lips stopped half smiling, diamond circled brows were raised in haste. All were longing, earnest. Palace, mansion, hotel, had each contributed to the palpitating mass, and all came with the like intention to see Miss Thorne. I had been to a theatre before, it had for me few attractions. All was heat, light, bustle, and suffocation.



My nerves resented such treatment. As I looked on the faces round me, I felt how different from others I must be; how phlegmatic. They appeared feverish from anticipated pleasure. I was actually bored. The curtain proceeded to loop itself up. I did not immediately turn. I concluded Miss Thorne would resemble the other actresses I had seen, be well developed, painted, powdered, and bejeweled. There was a suppressed ovation from the multitude. It murmured through the vast building from tier to tier. I waited; where was the shrill voice trained by some elocutionist, and now being declared perfect, which, for a living, was struggling and straining to give pathetic utterance? Where the gesticulation that displays the fine proportions of the braceleted arm and enamelled bust?

They were missing.

In the pale-faced woman robed in velvet dress and widow's weeds there was no beauty,



no majesty; the face was worn and sad, its pallor was not of cosmetics, but delicacy.

She had wrought hardly in the heat and dust of adversity, and the laurels won now were a weight on the brow genius stamped so notably.

It was an ordinary woman, till the kindled soul rose and wrapped the body in glory.

She spoke, tongue and eye alike deriving power from the same source—the heart.

Her earnestness cleaved a passage to others' feelings. She held them spell-bound, breathless, by the force of her will to make them feel the reality of what they beheld. They felt, they sympathised, they believed, and for the time forgot their existence in hers.

The clear voice carried its accents of alternate passion and pity to every heart. There were flushed cheeks, dimmed eyes; hard men knit their brows as some chord in their hidden lives was swept by the skilled



hand. Women shuddered—as the devil's Hate and Despair struggled for victory. Tears flowed as torn, panting, she turned to the Heaven of her earlier life, and defied temptation.

I was harrowed, moved past tranquillity; I wept tears of happiness and pride, pity and regret. The star that had risen in a Moorland home now transfixed the world by its brilliancy. The girl reviled and hooted from her kinswoman's house, had made for herself an abiding place amongst the annals of the great. Reader, the famous actress was Joan Berdan.

It was the work of one second to tell my husband of the discovery; the next we were making our way to the stage door. We passed through a crowd of jaded women and rakish men, scene-shifters, dressers, and other stage make-ups. Miss Thorne was still acting, the play would be over in a moment. I made an effort to enter the dressing-room; the maid refused.



"Her mistress never allowed any one in, she was very strict."

"I know that; but I am her cousin, she will be glad to see me."

I pushed past the attendant. Will confronted me with bristled hair. I half retreated, but the dog recollected me and came forward amicably. The next moment Jocky entered. Congratulations, notes, bouquets, followed. She bowed and closed the door in the face of the offerers. Miss Thorne and Miss Berdan were identical, they were passionless. The settled calm of her life was proof against tumult. Affection, admiration, joy, sorrow, had no power to flutter the heart that beat to the even rythm of daily bread. Her greeting was composed, sincerity shown in her eye, contentment spread a light over the wearied face. She was glad at her heart's core, but emotion was put by till next evening.

I cried again, she wiped my tears away.

"No need to weep, Penny."



There was need. God, how she had changed. The spirit of her life was gripped by necessity and strangled. Fate might be kind or cruel, it was immaterial now. All that could be hurt was dead. The world had a woman in it gifted above the generality; the body answered to the will, and pandered to the world's pleasure, but the spirit of that woman had no resting place with the herd that cried and laughed as she dictated.

On the stage Miss Thorne was passionate, earnest, pleading, witty, sarcastic. Off it she was timid, gentle, silent, indifferent, caring for only one thing, and securing it—solitude. Her rooms were in a house in Gower Street, and into them she breathed the atmosphere of home. Will was her friend and companion, her maid the human being to whom she spoke oftenest.

Was she resenting the decree of God by curbing one of the greatest hearts He ever caused to beat? No, hardly that. There



was no vindictiveness, she spoke well and pleasantly when she did speak, but a terrible recessitude had taken hold of her.

Society she determinedly refused. Her doors opened to none. Jewels, and notes with coronets on the top, found their way in and were cast carelessly into a drawer, to form a costly and peculiar heap. She turned it over one day, touching the valuables as if they stung.

"See, Penny, these are the sort of agents Satan uses. There's the glitter of Hell in that emerald cross, the eye of the Evil One in these rubies, and, for such trumpery, souls are thrown away. The flowers that come wither from impurity's touch, and moulder on the dust heap. Letters are written, wild, vehement, wicked, and glossed with an appreciation for talent, the compliments, the good form of aristocracy.

"They receive no reply. Silence, obscurity, is my protection, my warrant for respect-



ability. If they forced themselves into my presence I should set my dog at them. My conscience is my friend. I had rather die than give her one painful reflection."

I believed it.

The engagement was nearly concluded; the placards said, "Miss Thorne, for three nights only!" and they said truly. Wearied in mind and body, I wondered how she would pass through them.

Splendidly! applause greeted her on every side. She had triumphed. It was grand; an effort almost worth a life, and one was nearly paid for it. Utter prostration followed, she lay still day and night with her dog's head on her hand.

I did not think of the world, though my husband said it was ringing with her praises. I thought of her, and listened to the doctor. She was overworked; perfect quiet, change, and bracing air, must be had at any price, or he would not answer for the consequence.



Jack—to whom his cousin was a marvel—wanted her to return with us to Fetcham.

She refused.

“No, I will go home, let Penny go with me!”

I went.

The fresh moorland air revived her. Nanny knew nothing of her mistress's fame, and Jocky would not have her told.

“Let me forget it; I sicken at the recollection of the upturned faces, blazing lights, and blasts of music.”

I could get her to tell nothing of the time between her leaving Ringly Royal and our meeting. It was evidently a period of sorrow. We walked out on the moors eternally, morning, noon, and night. I ventured to mention Yorke. She checked me.

“Have you forgotten what I told you that night? It is my wish to forget him; aid me!”



I did, by being silent on the subject.

"Crag House" was poorer in furniture than many a cottage; no more had been added to what Jocky put in for Nanny's use.

The garden was a wilderness, the weeds reached the windows. People eyed us curiously when we went into the village. No one recognised Miss Berdan in the tired, delicate looking lady who walked so listlessly with the big dog at her side.

I wished Jocky to call upon Mrs. Thomas.

"Not yet, Penny," replied she, a spasm of pain crossing her face, "it would only make the wound gape more. I shall ever feel grateful to her for her kindness, but my sympathies do not turn towards her or her family in the least. Their sociality and loquaciousness used to overpower me. Their vast capacity to love terrified me, and, knowing I had not an atom to bestow upon any one, I felt a hardened sinner in their presence. If I went Mrs. Thomas would fold me in a black



alpaca embrace, and while she wept over me I should be thinking how horribly her cap ribbons smelt of ammonia. Of course I am to blame, such a hard nature as mine is despicable and disagreeable, so I do not purpose inflicting it upon any one. I have felt glad and sorry now and again, but I never could tell any one I did."

She sighed and turned abruptly into the church yard, near which we were walking. The grass had grown apace, and rows of nettles stared over the wall at us. It was not immediately that the grave we sought could be found. The stormy rain had battered the stone, and half obliterated the letters. But the simple inscription was still traceable, and told strangers that "Robert and Eva Berdan" lay side by side beneath that stone. There had been marriages and christenings in the old church since they were put there, and young feet had skipped over their resting place. In the summer twilight love pledges



had been exchanged by those who, when their race was run, would lie as still as they, a few yards further on. Howling winds had swept over them, thick snow had fallen and crusted them, thunder had shaken the church to its foundation, lightning had scorched the ivy on the belfry—and they knew it. Reader, you and I will one day sleep as soundly.

“See, Penny, am I not a lonely woman? This grave, that drab house yonder, empty of all but a few chairs, a decrepit old servant, and this dog, are my sole belongings. God knows I am desolate, but not hopeless, or unmindful of those I have lost.”

We walked home in silence.

The rooms were locked, with the exception of those we used, and the spiders had woven webs round the keys as they hung on their nails.

It was a forsaken house.

We had been three weeks inhaling the fresh air, and crushing the heather in our



walks, before Jocky improved. Her nerves had been so severely taxed that sleep had flown, and night was a dreaded time of darkness and terror.

The agony came, grim and relentless, and the girl rose up to meet and struggle with it. I pitied and watched, I could not help. A healthier tone of body would rout this phantom ; meanwhile, the brain wrought manfully against an eclipse.

This darkness had but one light—the light of other days, and God knows how full of misery they were.

The shadow that had tracked her since I knew her, followed her now. In her weakened state, events long past stood forth in vigorous misery, and reproached her. These rebukes, born of fevered thoughts, chafed and galled her mind intolerably. Remarks, suggestions, made by meddling people, recurred to her memory, and thrilled her with doubt. Had she done wrong, had she erred ? Agonising



thought, when the only voice that could have replied was hushed.

Then Reason took pity on the beating brain, and waived the horror back. Things as they *were*, not as they *seemed*, guided by Reason, gave the denial to Doubt, and before God and conscience the sense of innocence soothed.

It was an anxious time, one ever memorable to me, for then I witnessed the throes of a great heart, tantalised by a temporary disturbed mind, and the efficacy of faith.

Old associations revived old ways, and a dash of the former spirit and mischief recaptured Jocky. As her health improved, energy rose, and once more the armour was buckled on. She had promised to visit Scotland as Miss Thorne; I tried to dissuade her. Rest she had earned, and needed, why not take it till after Christmas?

“I prefer change and action; I never was intended to rust out. Do you remember,



Penny, my confession, the night Nanny went tea drinking ?

“ I marvel you did not deem me crazed, only I conclude that repression had taught me to moderate my visionariness.

“ Oh, Penny, God has been good to me, He saved me from myself; had He left me to feed on my own reflections, I should have gone mad. When life grew well-nigh intolerable, imagination crept into my prison, and tinted the bare walls warmly, drew quickening pictures, charging my sinking courage afresh, and tightening my hold on existence.”

There, the cloud was gathering on the wide brow; the complexion was leadening, every facile muscle was stiffening; the shadow was behind; I resolved to speak.

“ Jocky, what is there in your life that you cannot shake off? Where is your moral courage, that you avoid confronting the discomfort, whatever it is ? ”

“ My moral courage is—resting.”



## CHAPTER VI.

I HAD stung her ; there was a glitter in the eye not heralding peace. She paced the room, drew up the blind, and regarded the night. It was wild, overcast. Every white cloud that appeared was hurried off by a black one. Confusion was rife in the Heavens, there was a struggle going on in the mysterious heights.

“ I knew it ; when the sky is disturbed my heart is. I must be something akin to Nature since her feelings affect me. Ever has it been so, my spirits denote atmospheric changes, the convulsions of the globe are prognosticated and declared by my constitution. There is a change to-night, the wind is blowing from a wild quarter, there is a storm surging up. Harken, Penny, to the swell of



my heart, it is about to cast its treasures at your feet. Spurn them not, stoop and examine them, beneath their hideousness you will find truth. Reflect, then judge, and my faults, my glaring iniquities will melt like marrow. Look at this house, its situation, the society I had in village and home, and pardon what you may be inclined to condemn."

From my knowledge of things connected with her, my remembrance of her home, I fancied excuses would arise in plenty, but I was not prepared for the tale of crushed, stifled, terror and disgrace she unfolded.

"My father died when I was thirteen, and I was left to my mother's care. Her income was limited, my fortune a pittance, owing to a disastrous fire at the mills, which nearly ruined my father.

"People said it hastened my father's death. I was an only child, my brother, who was many years my senior, died when I was young, and I was forbidden by my father to mention him on account of the harrowing reflections



it brought. I obeyed, and as I grew older sympathised in a loss I had never known. I was not petted or pampered. My parents demeaned themselves calmly towards me.

“My father was a reserved man, my mother a weak woman. My father died, and my mother and guardian curtailed my education, and compelled my presence at home. You know how happy that home was, you may be able to conjecture how little suited to a girl, healthy and venturesome.

“I need not specify the process of reproof, curbing, and indignity used towards me. Every day the draught of poverty and shame was put to my lips, every day I refused it. It was not the indigence of empty cups and scraped platter. There was food, but so flavoured with discontent, that while it fed the body it starved the soul. I remonstrated.

“Why were we to be trodden into the mire, whose was the foot, that stamped on us? What shape did this ravenous idol assume that commanded us to bow our heads



before it, and lay our riches, health, hope, spirits, peace, at its feet, and then kept on howling—more, more? My mother knew its abiding place, and took morbid pleasure in obeying its behests, and insisted upon my doing so also.

“I would not. I declined to pay penance for what I had not done, I demanded an explanation. She gave it, moaning, wailing, affirming, contradicting, pleading, commanding, praying, raving. The inquisition was a—son. I had a brother, a muscular young man, whom the grave had declined, and Satan accepted. This treasure was kept hidden, it was gloated over by both parents as a thing of value and rarity. Rare, thank God, I believe such wretches to be. Few mortals are to be found so well acquainted with the practices of Hell as—my brother. He had sinned from his cradle upwards, tinily at first, immensely afterward.

“The parents of this imp bowed their heads in misery, and raising them, blamed each



other. It did not occur to them to let the proper course be taken with the evil creature they called child. Instead of exercising moral courage, they strained ingenuity to defeat the law, and the convicts sailed without their son. He was saved, but at what cost? Like some beast of prey he fed on their entrails, tore their bowels of compassion continually, viciously.

"They had spared him, he did not spare them. He turned on them, worried, gnawed, at the spirit till life lost its charm. Still this devil's child clung to them. He belonged to the devil, and the devil was in no hurry to take him. His life was jeopardised several times, yet he lived. Big, ugly, furious, he came like a thief in the night, and swept the coffer bare. His whistle, his taps on the window were harkened to in fear and trembling.

"He was admitted, fed, clothed, secreted till the danger was past. Days he lay hidden on the moors, crouching amongst the



heather, at night coming here for food. Money was his want, and he got it. The only time it was refused, he set fire to the mills. He knew the power he had over the old people, and he used it unmercifully. My father he crushed into his grave; my mother he terrified into a condition of peevish imbecility. The secret was kept from me; they lied to me, they said he was dead.

“They invented excuses when nocturnal sounds disturbed me, and, when I repudiated a cause assigned, used chilling authority. I was held in the grasp of despair. I early betrayed signs of determination and fearlessness that told them their son’s liberty might cease if I learned his existence. It was only when my father was dead and buried that the burden, being too heavy for my mother, she laid it in terror upon me.

“It was then the shadow became a substance, and I discovered with what I had to contend; it was then I learned how cruelly I had been netted by the iniquity of another.



I was invited to scheme and contrive to meet the requirements of this brute, to pander to the tastes of this desert dog. I refused. Indignation strengthened me, and I resisted with all my might. My temper helped me, I rose on its wings till I towered over my mother, and when I subsided things were on a different footing. She told me all, when he might be expected, the signal, the hour, his appearance and usual demeanour.

“I listened, and formed my plans. I did not give him up to justice, I merely organised a system of justice at home. I reflected sufficiently to form some opinion of such a man’s character, and when I viewed the one I had ascribed to him, I fancied my will might work. My intention was to keep him out, to render doors and windows strong enough to resist him. To threaten him with the law if he became unmanageable, and, if provoked, to put that threat into execution.

“I would not starve him, but I would submit to no more plundering. I would be almoner



henceforth. I saw if I did not persevere in this course, we should be soon stripped of the little left us, and reduced to a state of absolute beggary.

“There was little of value in the house as it was. I had the village joiner up, and had every screw and lock repaired that needed it. I caused stout bars to be affixed to sundry windows. The rope of the alarm bell I had exchanged for a chain. I provided myself with a whistle and rattle, a life-preserver and Will. I saw to the fastening of every door and window nightly, and then awaited his coming. My mother stormed and raved, she implored ; I paid no attention. Coward, she so dreaded the struggle that must ensue, that she preferred parting by degrees with all she possessed. She had however let me into the secret, and as usual our opinions did not coincide.

“Poor woman ! she tried to depict the scene that would follow the refusal, and collapsed into a state of inanimate terror. I assuaged her



fears, sternly, perhaps, yet reasonably. I promised to be kind in a measure ; he should have timely warning before the supply ceased. If he agreed to my terms and did not molest us, his liberty and life were his to use as he pleased. But, if he departed from these rules, I would give him up to the law, and let it provide for him in the future.

“I explained to her the position of her affairs, how it was necessary that retrenchment should be practised. She could not be brought to reason, he was her child as much as I was, she would share with him.

“By degrees we argued over the space between mother and daughter, and suddenly stood face to face two angered women ; she determined in her own way ; I held fast in my impression of right. Consulting my feelings only, I could have left her, as she wished, to foster a vagabond son, and end her days miserably. But conscience rapped sharply, and reminded me of my duty. Clearly it was my duty to protect the weak, being left



to my charge, to guard her soul and body from dangers my calmer judgment foresaw, and thwart the contrivances of the devil.

"We lived in a state of ferment. She resisted, I insisted, and one night he came.

"Penny, I was not always the light sleeper I am now ; it is owing to desire and anxiety.

"It was my wish to keep watch, and perplexity vanquished sleep. I deprived her of the key of her room door, so that I might enter at my pleasure. For all my pains I only got reproaches and hard words ; but the game seemed to fascinate me and I played on. Many an evening I have sat working, while she grumbled and heaped wretched consequences upon my head. They oddly enough did not prevent the workings of it, and often her storms were unnoticed. I became aware of this, and reason whispered 'Persevere, the track you are on must lead to a wide road, else you would stumble by the way.'

"I was solaced by a nameless peace, it fed



my heart, sustained my nerves. When fate looks down with bent brows, I heed her not, for I know there will surely come the rustle of my good angel's wings, and hide from my eyes the value of what I have lost.

"We watched and waited. I felt little concerned; mother drooped under the suspense. We went to bed. I looked at the night—overcast and brooding, a low rushing wind that smothered footsteps. It was early spring, some few bees had sought the heather, but their voices still were faint.

"The note of the lapwing had aroused me at dawn, and snug nests were formed in the thickest tufts of grass. New life was creeping into the cold brown earth, and warming slants of sunlight glorified bare promontories.

"But this night Nature was out of temper, and she showed her displeasure in cloud and wind. In the second watch he came, the wind hid his footsteps but not his whistle, and I knew him.



“Previous to my father’s decease, I had slept at the other side of the house, now I occupied a room near my mother’s. I rose and looked out. A man stood leaning over the fence. He was tall, thickly built, heavy in all respects. I went to my mother. She was sitting up in bed, her face bedewed with perspiration, locked in the chilling arms of terror, incapable of thought or action. I had no need to desire her to remain in bed, she could not get out of it. I spoke.

“‘I shall give him five pounds and warning. Go to sleep again.’

“I dragged my hair over my brow, and gently opened my window. He was swearing at his parents in the choicest language. I let him exhaust his vocabulary, and when he was about to repeat, I startled him with a loud ‘Ahem.’

“He had been accustomed to very cautious movements, the slow performance of almost paralysed hands. My abrupt, bold sound struck like an alarm on his cowardly ear.



Before he could recover from his surprise, I remarked.

“ ‘ I suppose you are the new policeman. It is only kind to tell you your predecessor did not whistle.’

“ ‘ He growled ‘ Who the devil are you ? ’

“ ‘ A middle aged person,’ shouted I.

“ ‘ Confound you, don’t make such a clatter.’

“ ‘ O, I have nothing to fear, and deaf people have a habit of shouting.’

“ ‘ What business have they to send you to me ?’

“ ‘ The business of necessity. There does not happen to be any one else. You need not be shy with me, I know *all* about you ?’

“ ‘ The devil you do, you are my imp of a sister ?’

“ ‘ Precisely, that’s my enviable position.’

“ ‘ Take your d—— head in, and send my father.’

“ ‘ He is in the churchyard, nearer to you than me.’



"He betrayed no surprise, no regret.

" 'The old woman will do; I suppose she's alive?'

" 'Assuredly, and in perfect health and spirits. She desired me to tell you, she believes I am more capable of shouting at you than she is, and henceforth you will have the pleasure of seeing me alone.'

"He now began to swear horribly. When he ceased, I explained clearly the arrangement we had come to, and waved the envelope containing the bank-note through the window. My voice I had purposely pitched high, correctly surmising that it would appear to him to peril his safety, and in a low tone I did not and would not speak. I knew there was no one to hear save mother. He cursed me heartily, and threatened to make me quiet before long. Now was my time to play my trump card. My mother did not know I held it. I laughed.

"My time is yours; death for me has no terrors, life has, for I daily expect to be



apprised of your execution. Thinking you may have some reason for wishing to defer that pleasant operation, I'll tell you what I have done. I have confided your description, haunts, and crimes to a noted solicitor, with instructions, that at my death, if it be not gradual, reasonable, and witnessed by three people of respectability, you are to be arrested on suspicion of having caused it. Consider for five minutes; if you are then agreeable to conform to my terms, I'll toss your money to you. If not, I shall shut up this window to-night, and you for ever.

"He snarled, growled, dug his heels into the earth like any wild animal, and finally held his hat out for the money. I threw it; I heard it drop into the crown, and saw him depart, then I fastened the casement. The conference had occupied more than ten minutes.

"When I returned to my mother I found her nearly mad. The remainder of the night was spent ministering to her. She upbraided



me while I alleviated her sufferings; she taunted me with having abused her confidence and acted contrary to the wishes of my dead father. I was silent. In my heart I blamed that father for allowing such a system of extortion and terror to exist in a land of law and protection. My mother, common sense pointed out to me as an incompetent person, and I decided, henceforth, to govern in all matters of consequence. My life was a worrying feud that taxed me to the utmost. My mother had sunk into such an abyss of despond, that she saw or heard nothing cheerful or pleasant, and she unjustly declared it to be my duty to lay aside the hopes and charms of life, and descend and bear her company there. She had a notion, that for the wickedness of my brother, I ought to go about in sackcloth and ashes, and mourn till life's dreary march was over. The selfishness of the idea angered me, and I rebuked her.

“ While she was intent on rendering my



existence and her own as wretched as discontent and unkind thoughts could make them, I was occupied planning to protect those lives from that man. I had every reason to believe that, should opportunity offer, he would not hesitate to lay one or both of us low. Me he hated with hatred extreme, for I had thwarted his schemes, and shown no signs of retraction; I was now always on guard. Come when he would, it was I who surveyed him before he knew it; I who received and shouted at him from a high window. I had trained Will, and not once did he fail me. What astonishes me now is, that my nerve never did. It was an unnatural calm, that, to sustain itself, sucked the quick of my life. I have been conscious that my heart has beat till every drop of blood receded, and I have waited with only life in my brain, till pulsation returned. Over my life there hung a dread that took all there was hard, buoyant, fierce in my nature, to keep it from smothering me.



"Can you understand what I suffered, how I flogged my senses and courage to preserve them intact? Do you not perceive how impossible it was for love, trust, gentleness, to live in such a vortex of thought? I never knew a night when I should be roused, my vigilance never slumbered. When I left home I did it fearfully, but in answer to the cry of nature for succour.

"I then procured a companion, stupid and nervous, a woman who would scream long and loud on the least provocation; all this I knew I could not have managed had I not held my mother in some control.

"I had inspired her with fear I took care never to abolish; and to that I attribute the success of my plans. Had she turned rebellious I could not have restrained her; but she had no force of will, and there I held her. My will crippled hers.

"He came often; it was he, the night you came down; he who found his way to Ringly Royal the night of the ball; he who came yet



again and attacked me like a wolf, and would have murdered me but for you, Penny.

“ Ah! you start, that is not all. It was he who murdered Travers Thorne. You ask me where my moral courage is. I tell you—resting. I have it not; to-night I am mentally as weak as an idiot, physically as feeble as a babe. I am goaded almost to madness by reproach; imagination will not harken; facts alone stand forth grim and terrible; my faults dance across my memory; I recollect my coldness; my want of gentleness and patience; my sternness when her silly cries stung me to disgust; my inattention to her pleadings. I see her sitting there, the weak, refined face twisted out of beauty's influence; the thin nervous hands plucking away at the eternal red knitting; the irritable tones of complaint grate on my ears, and I sit mute, occasionally dropping a word that burnt for many hours afterwards, hard, unsympathising.

“ Oh God! if I had now opportunity, how



I would explain ; how I would drag my mind down and open it before her. I would fetter it to hers, and let them crawl on together. If she would only come again, how I would listen ! ”



## CHAPTER VII.

WE wept, our sobs joined the wind sweeping across the moors. My heart was lifted in anguish and horror, admiration and incredulity. A woman with the intellect of a man ; tender, yet strong ; simple, yet complex. She had no equal.

Why mourn ? Faulty we all are ; only let truth be spoken, and pardon would be granted above and below. I proffered comfort ; I distilled it from my knowledge of what her mother had been. It was not rejected, but the wound did not close. Then woman's instinct told me the help must come from a man. Her assistance must be the approval, the support of a stout heart. It was her only chance of a new life, into which new joys and interests might creep. The one happiness for her now was to be loved and to love.



So far life had wearied her with its hardness and sorrow ; all her life she had longed for love, unknown to herself ; and the sense of absence had chafed the tender heart till it became painful. Then, up rose annoyance, and trampled the offender under foot, yet the gap remained. Without it she would not perish ; no, but the life would not blossom to the fullness of promise, the flowers of affection would not spring from behind the thorns of sorrow. I was grieved for her, angry with myself ; I had wrongly judged and condemned to myself an innocent person.

Pitt Berdan was the murderer of Thorne, —not Yorke Sutherland. Stung by the injustice of my suspicion, I undertook, by way of reparation, to be his advocate. I related what had happened after her departure ; I pleaded his love for her ; I entreated to be allowed to communicate with him.

She listened, her eyes growing soft and full of a tender light, but her determination to bear the disgrace alone did not waver.



“What! ask a good, honest man, a man of integrity, to ally himself to a murderer’s sister? Withered be my hand ere I write the note, or my tongue before I utter the sound!”

I tried to shake her belief in her brother’s guilt—

“How do you know he killed Travers Thorne?”

“Who else would, or could have done it? He was there that-night. I plucked a handful of hair out of his head as his hands were upon my throat to strangle me. He had to fly. He encountered Travers Thorne in the wood. God only knows whether they quarrelled, or whether the poor fellow merely crossed the brute’s path. In his mad state every one would appear to him an enemy. This was not his first offence, he could not afford to be caught, so he killed him and cast him into the rabbit-warren.

“Now you know why I could not defend myself against their base calumny. Had Mr.



Thorne come home, as I expected he would, his declaration would have carried weight, and I could have kept my secret, and the alarm been put down to anything.

“His absence strengthened the apparent guilt; and it was only when his body was found that the mistake was discovered to them and the murder to me. Then I did what I could; I spoke, and, to prevent a second tragedy, I left. I avoided all former associations, I disguised myself, and only confided in one person, the lawyer to whom I had earlier explained my brother's position. He helped me. I was hidden, yet aware, through his management, of what transpired of consequence to me. I went on the stage; when I found success likely, I adopted the name of the murdered man, intending to make it famous if I could; I succeeded; I made some money, but the iniquities of others cheat me out of happiness, and render my life solitary.”

I reflected. Her life had been a troubled



one; horrors had seasoned it with silence and dread, yet she was in no degree peculiar, beyond the power to charm. Many a girl so tried would have gone mad. She was a small woman, with a vigorous brain and will, and the heart of Robert Bruce. She walked the room, it was a habit she had, and, when I once asked her why she did it, she replied—

“To quiet the tiger within me; there are times, Penny, when it won’t lie down. Then I walk on the moors, in the passage, anywhere, till I feel it crouching, then I stop!”

I had been surprised at the time, now I understood her strange illustration. This walking had commenced when a young girl, and night after night she had paced the room when her mother had gone to rest; alone, and full of queer fancies, she yearned for change and companionship till exertion was the only sedative, it produced temporary exhaustion. Then she went to bed to lie with aching limbs and working brain till sleep



took pity on her. Morning brought no change, the bare moors, sometimes purple, sometimes black, were for ever vast and solitary.

How had she endured, when so calculated to shine in society, so capable of appreciating every intellectual pleasure. Well might she shake the prison bars at times, and cry for liberty.

Having told me her story, she was content to let the subject cease. I heard no complaining, no hopes for the future; life was to her an inevitable consequence that must be endured; a load to be carried till death released her.

There was the early patient courage shown again, side by side with the indifference born of weariness.

Yorke she never named, yet I believed he was loved in the recess of her deep, true heart. That he should have power to mar her career never occurred to her; homage she did not bestow upon any one thing, and the whines of



disappointment she hooted at. The affection that clips the wings of purpose, the puny love that enfeebles the courage, benumbs the arm, was spurned by her; the rational affection that needs two people to support it, the home that requires two workers in it, alone possessed any charm for her, and this she refused to solicit.

Nanny entered with a letter.

Jack wrote hastily.

"My boy is ill!"

"Trouble, Penny? Lift it on your back fairly and it will never make you stoop. What is it?"

"Frank is sick."

"Don't fret, we'll go and see the little man. Hurry up, hurry up!"

While I thought, she worked, and at half-past ten we were in the train, and "Crag House" once more deserted. Power, command, suited her. She managed the luggage and telegraphed to Jack. People gazed as she threaded her way through the crowd, the



big dog at her heels, but her wants so calmly notified, were instantly supplied.

A little news-boy ran up to her, his face glowing—hers relaxed—

“You, Charlie! and not grown an inch.”

She patted his shoulder, and the smile she gave him seemed to please the boy better than the copper.

We reached Fetcham late, and Dandy's first words, as he spied us through the window, were—

“Little massa's better!”

I breathed a thankful prayer. My baby was precious to me. Before I tasted of love I was content, but having learnt the secret of true earthly bliss, I felt how shallow life was without it, how insupportable it would be if I lost it. My husband's arms round me, my boy on my knee, I felt able to defy the world and dispense with it, if only I had them.

Jocky sat sweet tempered and sad, was she contrasting her life with mine, and struggling with cruel destiny?



Jack knew all, I had told it, and cried while doing it. He is a man of few words, but I saw his compassion was moved. Jocky to him was a wonder, to be her cousin was almost more than he could carry silently. I checked his pride by telling him if he did not forget her popularity she would leave us, run off and hide somewhere. Nothing had she a greater dislike to than lionising.

This threat operated, and the people at Ringly Royal little knew our homestead sheltered her they had reviled. Home ties had ever been weak with Jack, and the scandalous story well-nigh severed them. He justly denounced his mother's conduct as infamous, and begged to be allowed to tell her his mind.

Jocky said no, in a tone of honest pride.

It was of no consequence to her, she had done with her relations, and any pride they might feel in her had come too late. He offered her a share of our home. This she also declined, but said she would take a cottage near, if we liked.



We *did* like.

While all this was being arranged and discussed, I prayed that fate might smile on Yorke, and lead him to Jocky.

Time passed, Jocky was going to Scotland, and Jack said we should go also. His business took him there occasionally. For my child Jocky evinced great affection, and when she fondled him I was reminded of Yorke's face of jealous passion when she played with Albert's child. Surely those two loved not a little. She had ridden Frank round the room one day, laughing as he laughed, while I looked on.

A step on the walk caught my ear, I looked out. A little gentleman, with a big umbrella, was standing at the door.

Presently Dandy entered and presented a card to Jocky. Her face flushed, and she hurriedly set Frank down.

"Mr. Douglas! what can he want?"

His want took a long time to explain, and when I saw Jocky, her face betrayed that she



had suffered sharply during the interview. To my anxious inquiry she replied,

“It is the end, and necessarily a bitter one. A misspent life must have a disturbed ending. He is dead. Mr. Douglas is my lawyer. He kept my brother in sight at my request, and the other day news came that he had met with an accident on board the ‘Flat,’ where he worked, and lay in a dangerous condition. Mr. Douglas went to see him, and found the poor wretch in a terrible state of mental and bodily anguish. He desired to see me, but upon Mr. Douglas declaring that to be impossible, he confessed to him. His confession was simply the proof of my conviction. He *did* murder Mr. Thorne. They met, and Thorne tried to detain him, they closed, and it ended in the wretch strangling him. His first intention was to murder me, what for I cannot tell. But is there any use trying to account for the actions or thoughts of such an ungodly man? He is dead, I am thankful. For years he has been my terror. Now I



can rest. Deep in his grave he can harm no one, and I may forget."

I rejoiced for this release, and for the brighter tints that, with freedom from suspense, would creep into her future. To pretend any regret for the death of such a vile creature, would have been wicked. Such a life was too full of evil to make its protraction desirable. He was dead, dead in trespasses and sins as he had lived, and the world he had fitted himself for could hardly be darker than his life in this had been. I say again, I rejoiced.

"Penny, I shall not be home before nine to-night," said Jack one morning. "I am going to dine with a gentleman, and I may bring him back with me."

We kissed all round, and watched him down the lawn, when he bent his big body in graceful acknowledgment of the salute of a dwarf lady who resided in a cottage near. Jocky laughed.



“ Penny, you and Jack are exactly matched, no other woman would have put up with his strange ways so happily. And I don’t fancy any other man could have made the quaint little quaker such a contented matron. The ways of Providence are mysterious, and often hard viewed in the present. But time fosters better acquaintance with purpose, and I am come to the conclusion that patience is the only thing necessary to make every life perfect.”

“ Jocky, are you contented ?”

“ Yes, with what I have done ; what others have done for me I wish to avoid thinking about. The past and the present have formed a link. I begin to see that had my early life been pleasant and full of tenderness, had my affections been strengthened by companionship and attention, I should have fared ill now when I am left so alone. The shears of adversity were used by a practiced hand, they pruned away the weakness of a woman’s nature, propped and succoured the harder



tendrils that they might grow higher, and form a guard above my defenceless head. The process was a painful one, but, doubtless, necessary."

Her fortitude was deserving of admiration. Like the daisy, no matter how often trodden down, give it time, it would rise again.



## CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE the events recorded had been taking place, summer had fled, and not every day did the sun greet us. To ramble in the lanes, so thick with fallen leaves, was pleasant to Jocky. The mellowing woods brought no dismal fancies to her, the subdued beauty only suggested peace.

We went to meet Jack on his way from the station frequently. When I did not feel disposed, she went alone. This she had done to-night, her skirt tucked up, a fur tied beneath the pretty chin. She declared the life suited her exactly, that she would leave the stage, and set up a school for my children, it would agree with her nature better. I believed it would. I made tea, and beat a bright blaze out of the fire. The train was unusually late. There's a heavy step, Jack enters alone.



“What have you done with Jocky, monster?”

He wrung one ear nearly off.

“Left her in the middle of Cinder Lane, where it’s as black as your dress. You’ll be obliged to don wedding garments soon, Mrs. Sutherland.”

“Answer my question, and don’t be stupid. Where is Jocky? Have you quarrelled?”

“Desperately. She is going to leave us.”

“Jack, if you don’t tell me the truth at once, I will go and see for myself.”

“Then you certainly won’t be the right woman in the right place. Stay where you are, I want you more than any one else does. I only married you out of charity, because I saw no one else would undertake such a responsibility. I repent of my generosity.”

He folded me in an iron embrace.

“There,” I vociferated almost breathlessly, “have done, or you will have to consign me to a coffin. I am not a great woman like your mother.”



"Rather fortunate for you that, young lady, else you would never have been Mrs. Jack. But it is about time I put you up to the last scandalous proceeding in these parts. Two people are making love in the middle of the Cinder Road. They are standing in a white heat, with clasped hands, saying Heaven knows what, I am sure they don't. Penny, to be serious, a crisis is at hand, Jocky is about to relinquish spinsterhood."

I gazed in astonishment. I only hoped • one thing, and that seemed impossible. Jack saw my bewilderment.

"Did you ever hear of, or see, a young man named Yorke Sutherland. You had better bustle up your memory a little, for he does not like to be forgotten."

"Yorke! Yorke here?"

"Yes, walking back with Jocky, and taking as long over it as he possibly can. The other day, Penny, he came to my office, he had just returned from an Italian tour, and said he was coming to see you. I tried to



put him off, and he noticed it. In the end out came the truth, and I don't think it was ever told to better purpose. They have both suffered, and in my opinion behaved ridiculously, and but for me would have suffered on. Don't cry: here they come."

I had just time to wipe my eyes, I was crying for joy and shame. Would Jocky ever forgive me, if she knew I had suspected Yorke? How could I have done so; he was handsomer than ever, and how he loved her. There being no silent dread to stifle her feelings now, she returned his affection liberally. Sometimes the old bewitching perverseness sprang up, but he understood her better, and seemed rather to like it than otherwise. They were wiser for waiting, and determined to see no faults in each other, since they had experienced the bitterness of separation.

"Jocky, how much do you love me?" I heard him ask her one day.

She measured a speck on one pink nail.

"So much, the least bit in the world,



Yorke. Not half as much as your mother loves you. What does she say to your last act of disobedience ? ”

“ She writes a penitent letter, Jocky, and hopes you will forget the past, and go there before our marriage. She is sorry for what she did.”

“ Is she ? If she only knew how little I care about her or her sorrow, she would keep it to herself. I will not go, Yorke ; I cannot forget her unkindness. She is a cruel, bad woman, though your mother and my aunt. Do not mention the subject again.”

He never has named it again. Eunice came to stay with me over the wedding. Charlotte and Isabel wrote, but Jocky took no notice of their letters.

The secret of her brother is divided between us four, and *buried*.

Why should I defer the happy termination to so eventful a life ? They married. One day in May, the world lost an actress, and Yorke Sutherland won a wife.



They live near here, I see her daily, bright, happy, contented, loving her husband and babies, as only a great-hearted woman knows how to love.

Much of the sternness has gone, the tenderness that lay hidden so long, has leaped up responsively to the love that never ceases. All that is noble, gentle, is she, who silently carried her cross for years, and earned in the end—Peace.

END OF MARRIED AT LAST.







# HARVEST QUEEN.







# HARVEST QUEEN.

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## CHAPTER I.

MIDNIGHT. The never-failing voice of "Big Ben" has just announced the twelfth hour to the many watchers, like myself, in this dense city—called it reverently and impressively. I love his sure, solemn tones, they become so friendly to my listening ear, so cheery to my nightly vigil! Warningly he tells the millions, the sinning throng in London's heart, that another day has fled; that the last minute has eluded their grasp. But few pause to harken, few stay to regret—on rolls the great wave of life, nearer, nearer to the brink of eternity!

It is very still without, no hurrying steps come down the quiet street; a stray carriage crossing the square, or a snatch of a song



from some home-seeking bacchanalian, alone disturbs the silence. Softly falls the moonlight on the time-honoured roofs, beneath which droops many a weary head, throbs many a breaking heart, and the angels passing by catch the stifled sighs that float on the frosty air, from lips that have ceased to ask for a brighter morrow, from hearts which parted with hope long years ago.

And I sit rocking myself gently, the light from the hearth illuminating the tiny, scantily-furnished apartment; the lamp, turned low, making a long shadow on the table spread for supper, and my ear strained to catch the first echo of my queen's firm, swinging step, the first footfall of my beautiful, imperious Bell! Nana has gone to the theatre to fetch her.

My sister is an actress! Ay, say little, nip in your mouth, think much; but, reader, "judge not lest ye be judged"—shrink not in thought from our home, the angels do not! Proud, brave Bell! the step I love so well beats nightly on the boards, nightly she



sweeps across the stage, drawing praise and admiration freely, but never once has the star which rose for her hidden its face.

They call her cold, bitter, scornful, mean, but I know where to put my hand on a stout, true heart; I know whose purse has satisfied the cravings of many an ebbing life, whose knees have bent on many a garret floor beside a dying bed. "Charity" is much made of, loudly trumpeted, unceasingly preached, sparingly practised. The pompous mayor, the well-fed alderman can look straight over the head of want, turn a deaf ear to the feeble voice beseeching bread, and put their names down for £20 to the already swollen list of subscribers to "The Mission in Golcondascunderabad," and devote their only sincere feeling to the hope that no one may ask them where it is. But there is a more soul-stirring charity; the liberality born of poverty and self-denial; and where is it so dauntlessly performed as amongst the Bohemian class, who are so faithful to each other, so ready to help, as



they who stand behind the foot-lights ? The duke and duchess, the earl and countess, the monied merchant may distribute the gold from their distended purses, but the slave to the public will divide his crust with a poorer brother.

When first Isabel became famous (a few years ago), rumour was lavish in supplying her with what she had not got—a divorce, a widowhood, blighted affections, and a mysterious parentage, and lastly, that Miss Boucher's sister was a dancer in Paris. *I* am that sister, and a cripple. So much for report.

It was my infirmity, my withered leg, that drove Bell to the stage ; I am a burthen to her, though she never will allow it, never tires of working for me. Often, when the world gives her the credit of presiding at an "orgie," she is comforting me in my agony. When I am quivering with pain, it is she who tenderly rocks me, speaking in those sweet tones, which, not two hours before,



have held a crowded house spellbound ; and on her snowy breast my damp head is pillowed.

It is for my sake we live in this humble home, that a provision may be made for me, that I may have the most nourishing diet, the richest wines ; and in the holidays we go to some pretty, cool, sea-side place, and I peg about on the shore with my crutch, and spoil all my dresses with the salt water, and laugh and chatter to Bell, who laughs in return, and pushes the hair out of my eyes with her long white fingers. She is very handsome ; *I* should have found it out if every one else had not, because I *love* beautiful things, they draw me to them. She is tall and majestic, with solid, transparent, sloping shoulders, a splendidly proud face, which unites imperceptibly with the marble throat, full, flashing grey eyes, under long, heavy lids, and a mass of coarse chestnut, redish hair, *very* coarse, and possessed of the most defiant waves and twists.



I am three degrees fairer, stunted, and no use to mortal, only a drag to Bell. I need not say I love her, I am jealous of the ground she treads on. Such is the position we hold to each other—near in heart, apart in appearance.

Now for parentage: I cannot say plaintively, "We are seven," but I feel sorrowful enough when I write. "We were four." Yes; there were four of us Bouchers, all born at different periods in the hot, extravagant clime of Demerara, and though we entered it disjointly, we left it unitedly.

I can recollect our youthful days very distinctly, having been what is termed an old-fashioned child. My sweet mother used to say I was a child of God's—may it prove so. I was always fond of dreaming, I am now; and I have made the acquaintance of numberless visionary beings voiceless and sightless to my sister.

Whenever I fall into this delicious open-eyed sleep before Bell, she rouses me with feverish cries of "Georgie! Georgie!" and



hot kisses. I wonder where's the need of me; I seem only equal to one thing—disfiguring all the paper I can lay hands on. I wish I had a relation a stationer. But I only know of one in all the world besides Bell—a cousin, married to a canting parson. We were a very united family, our extreme unity was painful (strong affection often is); whatever hurt one was felt by the others—I mean us three elders, Ned, Bell, and myself; we had intruded our tiny presence on our parents' notice most hastily.

Then came a gap, which was filled up at the end of nine years by winsome Memie, who was only lent us to kiss and cuddle. Some of the angels must be envious, else they would never have stolen our little darling so early. She was a weeny, waxen baby, with a head covered by hair like yellow filoselle, scarcely deserving the name of hair; it made no attempt to stand up for its own rights, it lay in soft rings over her head, and acknowledged no parting.



I have still my old habit of asking awkward questions, and I said to Bell the other night—"What should we have done with Memie now?"

"Georgie, don't," said she with flushed cheeks. And I didn't any more, for it was in Bell's arms she used to lie, her little fat fingers beating a tattoo on Bell's plump neck, and there she—died. Bell was always our queen, she drove Ned and led me, and she was as wilful as she is beautiful. I have known her take a quarter-of-an-hour to mount the nursery stairs, in Demerara, sitting down on every step to enquire—"An't I a good girl, Nana?" "Yes, Miss Bell, a *very* good girl," would reply our much-enduring attendant. Nana nursed us all, and her black face received as many kisses as our sweet mother's.

Bell is like her father; from him she inherits her imperious manner, her perfect features. He was a big, commanding man, with a long, curling, brown beard, and glit-



tering eyes, who *would* be obeyed, and smoked tremendous Havannahs.

They were a picture, my father and mother, they formed my childish estimation of all that was noble and handsome, and I used to feel proud of belonging to them when they came to bid us good night before starting for some "Government House" ball. My blood flowed faster at sight of my lovely mother, so gentle, so sweet, with her milky-white arm laid confidently on my father's thick one, and her soft eyes smiling.

My mother was the most beautiful of all the ladies we knew; and my father might have been jealous, only she never gave him cause. We made a creditable appearance before our parents' guests: Ned and Bell in all their beauty, I behind, limping with my eyes seeking mother, and Nana with the angel baby bringing up the rear.

Father used nearly to draw the life out of little Memie with his long kisses, while mother said mildly, "John, my dear!"



When Ned was fourteen, Bell thirteen, and I twelve, we were informed that the time had arrived for us to go to England, where we were to stay till our education was completed. We were not taken aback; this intention had been known to us many years. And as we were not to be divided, the pangs of parting were, in a measure, mitigated.

Of course we had been receiving instruction, and Bell and I had profited thereby, but dear, easy-going, loving Ned, he *was* a sluggard! I used to do all his sums for him while he taught the bull-finch to pipe "The girl I left behind me," or turned his good-looking countenance the colour of claret, blowing birds' eggs. His tutor charitably prophesied a great deal from emulation, which was to be found at public schools, but I fancied to all the master's attempts to stir him up, his response would be "O, bother!" I never loved anybody like my brother, and it was queer love, for I used to laugh at his blunders till I cried, and wind up by writing



his exercise for him. We were great cronies, Ned and I.

Bell, you must know, rather despised us, her talents were of a superior order, and sometimes she would treat us to a scene from "Romeo and Juliet," with the table cloth pinned round her for a train, while Ned and I sat huddled on a desk with our mouths open.

But I forgave Ned everything because he was so strong, and so tender. When we went out walking with him I never got tired, for he would stoop down and whisper—"Clasp your arms around my neck, Georgie!" and carry me ever so far, making Bell or Nana bring my crutch. There are many larger brains, but never a greater heart!

This projected estrangement from home subdued, but in no wise terrified us, and we regarded it as one of the inevitable moves in our lives. We were to sail in about three weeks, in the "Huntress," and our English home was to be with our widowed uncle in



Cavendish Square, and cousin Ada, who was Bell's senior by three years, and a very accomplished young lady. We had mapped out a considerable portion of our life, when, without any preparation, any warning, there arose a gust that scattered our plans widely. Memie was to go! I bellowed loudly, it seemed to me a piece of horrible barbarity; Bell and Ned turned and confronted our weeping mother.

"The baby!" Yes, the baby, the tiny doll of three years; it was our father's command. I never thought my male parent a brute before, but I pegged up and down, pleading for the poor wee darling excitedly.

"It is no use, Georgie, dear," wailed mother. "Your father has made up his mind; he says, four can go as well as three, and she would be spoilt here, besides having you and Bell to take care of her."

From that hour mother drooped, and she hovered near the nursery door, like some poor bird bereft of its nestlings. We three



wept, not for ourselves, but for mother and baby. Father marched about, sternly grand, as if not quite at ease respecting this last order, and I shirked kissing him for two days. But if *we* were readily appeased and controlled, some one else was not. Nana rebelled, openly, stoutly, defiantly. She refused to be parted from the baby. Other nations and colours are faithful—this I will allow; but never that a black woman's love for her nurslings can be exceeded. Their affection is sullen, dark, deep; they show little, say little; but rouse that passion, and then observe the dogged tenacity with which they cling to the child.

Nana comes of a slave stock, her ancestors have all been in bondage for many generations. My mother was an American, born and reared on her father's plantation in Georgia; her mother was a Frenchwoman. A strange mixture, you will think—English, American, French. True, but I challenge you to produce a finer specimen than Bell,



or one possessed of stronger brain and stouter heart.

But we have not to do with my sister at present, only with Nana. Slavery is, we all know, abolished, but the slave race is, in most places, exactly the same as when the whip cracked behind them, and brutality was all the wage they received. Better treatment has softened their manners, sweetened their lives, but, on the whole, the negro servant of to-day is the counterpart of the slave that formerly stood on the auction-block. Many this day are working—free—on the land which bears the impress of their forefathers' shackled feet. Affection is as strong and binding to the black as thongs, and I again repeat, you have only to strike at what they love, to rouse their native ferocity, that wild animal fury, which freedom, and disuse of the lash have served to subdue.

When my mother forsook all and followed my father to his home in Demerara, Nana



followed her young mistress of her own free will. They had played under the orange-trees together as children, and the suggestion of a separation by anything save death was determinedly declined by Nana. "Her young missis was going to a strange land, 'strange people, so she would need her." And she had needed her; it was Nana who had watched her bedside, and us little ones in turn; Nana who had carried us through all our sicknesses; Nana who had come to England with us. Yes, she confronted my father with glowing eyes, and said—

"I must go with the children to England, massa, it is noways possible that this pickaninny can do without Nana."

He stared at her and Memie, whose tiny fingers were laced in Nana's wool; he reasoned, he commanded; and nurse eyed him disdainfully. I consider it no mark of disrespect towards my father, to tell you that Nana had never felt for him that affection and



reverence which formed her devotion to our mother; she deemed him what he unquestionably was, a hard, exacting man.

“Very good, Massa Boucher, then I leave your service, and I take passage in the ‘Huntress,’ along with my children.”

My father turned white; he was beaten, he knew that Nana had saved money, and that he could not prevent her accompanying us. I could have clapped her on the back, faithful creature; she submitted to us big ones going, but when it came to sweet, lisping baby, it was like plucking her heart out.

Hostilities ceased, peace was proclaimed, Nana was to go with us because of Memie, and poor mother seemed to take heart. I have every reason to thank God for her determination which overcame my father’s objection; what Bell and I would have done without Nana I cannot imagine. She loves her sunny, rich land second to us, and I know, did anything happen to me and my sister, she would make her way back to Georgia.



She is aware that "Cedarcreek" is in strange hands, my grandfather and grandmother both died soon after I was born, and mother was an only child; but her heart often turns to her native place, and the tears roll down the ebony cheeks when she describes my mother's home. She stands majestically in her calico gown—she adopted also the English white cap, at Bell's earnest supplication—a strong, muscular woman, considerably broader than many men, and pictures the place so feelingly and graphically, that a less vivid brain than mine might see it through her eyes. As it is, I feel at home in Georgia, and sometimes I half yearn to behold the spot so loved by nurse.

She never wearies of telling me how lovely Miss Isabel (our mother) was, and how many offers she had before my father came. Nana's description of my mother's "*affaires du cœur*" always provokes me to smile, sometimes to laugh. It must be the solemn way in which she relates them, and the im-



pressive nods she gives her grizzled head. Certainly Bell is contrary to her mother, who, according to Nana's account, nearly dissolved herself in tears after each offer, and embraced grandmother.

I suspect that it is from that old lady we inherit our talent for French, which we both speak like natives, though we have never set foot in the land. If my health ever gets more to be depended upon, we shall go there for a long visit. But Bell's engagements are always trying enough to me, and she won't leave me and take Nana, so we all three go, and shut the house up. When the holiday's come, we are glad enough to creep down to some pretty fresh spot and rest.



## CHAPTER II.

THE "Huntress" was equipped for her voyage, and so were we. Never shall I forget the last night at home. Mother was like a drooping lily, and her slender fingers wandered over Ned's tawny locks lingeringly. Have you ever made one of those present before a home separation? I know nothing sadder, nothing more silent. It was a relief when bed-time came (it was our last sleep on shore for many a night; we were to sail at nine the following evening), and Bell and I lay down depressedly, and anything but sleepy. It was mother's habit to come and kiss us when she was at home, often did she steal from father and the company to give us her gentle good night. I cared nothing for father's kisses, not much for him, and mother



knew it. He was, according to my opinion, unnecessarily strict and harsh, frequently disagreeable. I think that was one reason why mother parted with dear, stupid Ned so readily—they could never have got on peaceably as Ned neared man's estate.

We were awake, occupied with our thoughts, when mother glided in like a spirit, in a delicate peach satin dress toned down by white lace (my father was proud of his beautiful wife, and grudged her nothing—Demerara is an extravagant place—I have reason to know that and remember it).

“Are you easy to-night, Georgie?”

“Yes, mother dear.”

I am not always bad, reader; I have good times, to-night is one, and I am free from pain and bright enough, but the attacks are acute and swift, and then I am feeble for days after. I was not born a cripple, I could trot about well till I was nearly five, but a chill after fever numbed my leg, killed the life in it. The doctors teased me with galvanism,



and all manner of contrivances, but to no purpose ; my limb is like a dead thing hanging to me, drawn up, and half the size of the other. I am less inclined to murmur as each year slips by ; my helplessness may have been the best guardian for beautiful, wild Bell.

Mother's voice was low and tearful as she talked to us, and, though we had been kissed and blessed, she did not leave us, but remained kneeling by our pillow.

"Mother," asked Bell, sitting up, her wealth of hair streaming over back and bolster, "what do you grieve so for?"

"O, Bell ! for the baby, for the baby !"

My God ! what anguish was revealed in those words ! It was the cry of a bursting heart. I felt damp, and my temples throbbed ; I always become like that when I am *hurt*. Bell was trying her best to soothe mother, I could do nothing but shake. Then came the heart-rending appeal—

"Bell, Georgie, promise me you will never



forsake my little one, that you will never be harsh to her, that you will comfort her in her sorrows, my tiny blossom ! ”

“ Yes, mother, we do promise,” we replied, choking. Sob, sob ; sniff, sniff ; it was awful ; we had not an atom of composure between the three of us, we all wept in a heap, and smeared each others’ faces. Then mother went, and immediately Bell and I, as if we had not done enough already, fell to crying afresh, as if our lives depended upon it.

When we had tired ourselves out I recollected Ned ; mother would be sure to plead for Memie to him, and he would be certain to cry. Ned was a dreadful crier—because he was so strong, I suppose—he *howled* again. I slipped out of the tumbled bed.

“ Georgie, where are you going to ? ”

“ Ned’s room ; I *know* he is crying, Bell.”

That appeared to me a sufficient reason for getting on the roof had he been there. I reached my crutch and limped off, my hair flying. By the by, it is flying this moment ;



it curls naturally, and I have acquired no way of putting it up, Bell likes it down. But I warn her, her whim cannot be gratified after the first grey hair appears, up it must go then.

I arrived at Ned's apartment breathless, and hearing a curious sound, entered straightway. It was the poor thing trying to smother his sobs by burying his face in the pillows, which sobs, being disappointed of their natural outlet, the mouth, rushed frantically down into his body, causing a series of convulsions, which nearly lifted him out of the bed. I was terrified, and drummed on his fat back, which action reassured me by eliciting the customary "Boo-hoo!"

"Neddy, darling," said I, lying down beside him, "we've all been crying, and I'm so tired!"

Another moment and I was clasped in his arms, our cheeks resting side by side.

"You are a dear little soul, Georgie. Mother has just gone; she came to beg me to



love Memie *always*, just as if I wouldn't, just as if I didn't, you know."

Here I found myself rising with Ned under the influence of a gigantic sob; when we got down again he proceeded—

"Georgie, I *hate* father for sending baby with us, it is so cruel to mother, taking all away at once!"

Here I, in consideration of my sedateness and precision, thought it my duty to call Ned to order.

"You must not dislike father, Ned, dear, it would distress mother; he means it for the best, and Memie's good."

"Moonshine!" retorted Jack, "what good can it do a baby to leave its mother? it's a blessing Nana's going, too; I wonder what uncle will say to her, and if we shall like him?"

"We must try to; I hope he's not stern, like father."

In the midst of our hoping and conjecturing, Bell entered, looking like a wondrous



mermaid, and we chatted till we heard father's step on the stairs, at which signal we made off.

I cannot expatiate on the parting; the remembrance of it causes, even now, a return of that unutterable agony, and mother's sweet, stricken face as I saw her for the last time.

We reached the "Huntress" without the silence having once been broken, save by father's ominous cough; I wondered whether he was coughing his feelings away, or if that was a man's manner of crying, and I considered what an advantage it would be to dear, moody, swollen-lipped Ned. I hobbled on board after Bell and father, Ned after me, and then Nana and baby.

The deck was crowded, and the people eyed us, and called me "poor little thing," which made my face hot. Bell was awfully pale, and had her hat dragged over her eyes. Ned looked actually vagabondish, with his hands stuffed in his pockets, and his chin



rooted into his shirt front. There were some gentlemen, mostly officers, going home on furlough, all known to father, and who gazed at tall womanly Bell admiringly, but made friends with me. Then arose the cry—"Boats for shore, ready!" and father kissed us all round with not the ghost of a tear in his eye. I stood watching his tall, military figure cleaving a passage through the excited, tearful crowd, and listening to a female's rhapsody on his handsome face and wonderful self-command—"such an example!" *She* might think it an example, I thought it unfeeling. Then I felt a firm warm pressure on my shoulder, and looked up straight into the sunburnt face of an elderly man, whose puggery and kind eyes made me recollect the shepherds of the East portrayed in Nana's Bible.

"You are not weeping?" asked he incredulously.

"No," said I, "I can't any more, I have wept all night."



The clasp grew closer.

"Perhaps your father has."

"No, but mother did."

"So did mine," replied he, sighing, "when I left her fifteen years ago. Won't you go to your cabin? your sister has."

"I suppose so — where's Ned?—Ned!" screamed I, half in a fright, and a rumpled head appeared further on, at the ship's side. I limped away without having the manners to say good bye to my friend.

We were, for a short space, unspeakably wretched, and sat crouched together, silent, while Nana hushed baby to sleep, and the "Huntress" sailed away from the land of our birth. Then we went to bed, and it was a second sorrow for me to part with Ned, and a third to discover that one berth was not equal to holding Bell and me. O, how ill we were! I especially. Nana lifted me into that horrid, coffin-like thing they called a bed. Many times during that interminable night, and next day, I was too weak to fall



out. We kept our sitting room till the Thursday, and the captain came and carried me on deck, ordering Bell and Nana to follow. He *was* so kind! not just that once, but to the very last. He petted me, so Ned said; I know he was petrified when I declared myself to be the owner of a dozen years and some odd months. You see I was so small, I deceived people till I began to talk, and then they called me "old-fashioned."

I liked being in his arms, he walked up and down so reliably, though the ship was executing a great many flourishes; I told him so, with my eyes shut, and the least particle of my nose appearing from the folds of the blanket.

"Ah! I have got my sea legs on, little maid; you'll get yours by and by."

"No!" replied I, decidedly, my nail scraping the anchor on a button of his coat, "I shan't! I have only one *useful* leg, you know."

He was mute, and, opening my eyes, I found his blinking so, I marvelled why he



had not eyes like his legs—steady. After a while he proposed putting me to rest somewhere, and made a move towards some ladies, but I cried “Don’t!” I had caught sight of my father’s trumpeter, with her blonde hair dressed in broad numerous plaits, sitting crocheting.

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want to talk to *her*; take me away.”

And he did, to the far end of the deck and put me down by myself. It was so good! I lay and thought of mother, while watching the silver track that marked our passage through the waters, and the swift-winged albatrosses circling above. Every moment was putting me further from her loving arms, every wave that rose seemed a year, and in the midst of the mighty voice which speaks no language, there came to me the conviction that I never *should* see mother again.

A moan escaped my lips, which called some one to my side, my friend of the first



evening, and another equally brown. Their tanned faces expressed more sympathy than their tongues, and one said—

“Where the deuce is that alabaster damsel! she ought to be with this child.”

“Please don’t, I am comfortable here, and Nana has baby to mind.”

Again the countenances expressed pity, and the first speaker, bending his face to mine, asked good-naturedly—

“Shall I carry you about a bit? I can do it *quite* as well as that two-legged lobster who put you here.”

I knew he meant the Captain, who *had* a face resembling corned beef.

“What is your name, if you please?” inquired I, primly.

“Will Corry.”

“Then, Mr. Corry, you are not to call the Captain names.”

“Very good, ma’am!” answered he bowing.

“You are making fun?” asked I.



"Never was further from it in my life, I assure you."

"Have done, Corry, you teaze her," remarked his companion.

"I do nothing of the kind, we'll be better friends than any of you, yet, Where's your ladyship's sister?"

"With Ned, I expect. Bell's *very* pretty."

"Listen to her, Hay; she *expects* her pretty sister's with Ned. You little antiquated virgin! you'll be the death of me."

I hadn't the faintest notion what they were both roaring at, and I decided that they were extremely rude.

Mr. Will was correct, we *did* become allies, and I forgot my sorrows in chatting to them and giving them impudence. Before we parted we had agreed to exchange locks of hair, that is, Mr. Corry and I.

Those who have been on board ship will know how the days pass; they are all alike, and the only variety to be got is conversation. To be sure there was a piano in the saloon,



out of tune, and to which the only musician amongst us (a Miss Lemaitre) gave fits, and all the gentlemen a dispensation.

I was the pet—why need I deny it? I was kissed, and petted, and carried about by every one of those men, and I thought Bell would have liked to be me. Those who had moustaches turned their cheeks to be kissed, because I objected to the “bristles.” Memie caused quite an uproar when any of them stole her from Nana, and they would one entreat the other to let him hold her a bit, most earnestly. The ladies used to laugh at the great fellows marching about with baby’s cheek pressed to theirs, and Memie repaid their affection by clutching at their locks and uttering shrill cries of distress when the “Fairy,” as Mr. Will called Nana, appeared.

I cannot remember all their names, but I can their faces, unmistakably; they were very kind to Bell and me, and taught Ned to play billiards and “poker” in a very deadly style. My first friend was a Colonel Acton—



the others I recollect were called respectively—Harry Hollins, Walter Stretton, Grant Murray, Charlie Withers, Captain Fraser, and Will Corry. They all liked me and my sharp tongue ; I liked the two last best, I sat between them at dinner and engrossed their attention completely.

Captain Fraser said he believed I was an elf, and Will Corry taught me some curious things, and, amongst the rest, was the following, which he declared to be the Lord's Prayer in Welsh :—"Iginney maginey youck a trouf, me parver daved ven, feather bliss, bliss chop, and feather briskil bren." He used to make me laugh till my cheeks got rosy, and then he pronounced Boucher Georgie (as he persisted in calling me) pretty. I *did* like Will Corry, in spite of his ugliness (he *was* ugly, I did not like to own it before), and I cried on the sly when he had kissed me for the last time, and confided to my mercy a few of his "pig's bristles," in an envelope—I had shorn my most silken curl for him.



## CHAPTER III.

AN immense deal of noise and bustle, and we were being kindly welcomed by an old gentleman with white hair—Uncle. He had come to meet us at the docks, and take us home to Cavendish Square. He expected Ned, Bell, and me, not baby or Nana, and when Bell introduced them, he ejaculated—

“God bless me! What’s this? John must have been mad. What did your mother say, my dear?”

Before Bell could reply, Ned struck in—

“Nothing! but it nearly broke her heart to part with Memie.”

Now came my turn, and my ready tongue spoke after its own unruly fashion—

“Uncle, baby is to do *exactly* what she likes, she is *never* to be punished; if she is.



ever naughty you must punish one of us, we promised mother to take care of her little one."

For which impudent speech I got two more kisses, and the benefit of Uncle's eyes all the way to his house.

Of course we were to go to school, we had come to England on purpose for that, but Uncle's house was to be ours between times. I liked it, and I liked him, but not very much our cousin Ada, or her companion, Mrs. Iver, a tall woman with skeleton fingers. Ned nicknamed her the "Spanish rabbit," because she made her hair form lop-eared braids, and she was always so unfortunate as to be by the door of our room, if we chanced to open it suddenly, which impressed us unfavourably. But we were very contented, and I found myself a personage of considerable importance in the establishment.

At the end of September we went to school at Harrow, the whole lot of us, including baby and Nana—Uncle wisely considered



that Memie would be happier with Bell and me, and perfectly safe at Miss Good's, so it was arranged. Ned was at Harrow school, and boarded with the head master. We saw him often during the week, but always on Sundays, and I could tell by his face how things were progressing. Gentle, stupid Ned, with his thoughtless, laughing countenance, who was better friends with a fox-terrier than with Euclid, and knew vastly more about the racing calendar than classics! he was everlastingly in the rear. And so was I, in remembering Miss Good's orders. I somehow could *not* let Ned go on Sunday without a kiss, and none of the boys dared laugh, because he would have hammered them.

I think the "pastors and masters" were amused, for they made way for me regularly. Bell was better behaved, and tremendously admired; Jack used to be charged like a blunderbuss with messages and slips of paper, which he, dear, blundering fellow, gave to me if I appeared first, and over which I



used to snigger and laugh before I delivered them to Bell.

After we had been there some time, and Memie was quite at home, Miss Good suggested, one Sunday, that she should be taken to church, she was old enough. Therefore, she went, and sat between Bell and me. When the clergyman (we knew him, and Memie was a great pet of his) appeared, she screamed delightedly at the top of her baby voice, "There's Mr. —, and in his night-gown, Bell!"

There was a general titter, and Miss Good looked ready to faint. We whispered to her to be silent, but could not prevent her chuckling, and wagging to him her pretty golden head, to the very back of which her blue-quilted satin hood had slipped. When Nana was acquainted with her darling's conduct, she laughed joyfully, exclaiming—

"Dat's right, picaninny! use all de eyes de Lord hab gib you!"



Memie did not attend public service again, because she went to swell the throng on high. She died of croup one night, in bed, between Bell and me; there was only a faint rattle, a little shiver, and our darling had flitted away. There's a pretty ring of yellow hair in the drawer in my desk this moment, I cut it all damp from the heavy head so early crowned; and another one is by its side which I clipped for mother, and which I never sent.

The Lord's hand was upon us just then; the next mail brought news of mother's death. We were supplied with no particulars, so I cannot retail them to you; I only know she drooped and died, sweet mother! and I wept no more, for I knew that she and Memie had met each other. That was a bitter time; Ned cried alone, Bell and I together, Nana groaned, and insisted on sleeping at the foot of our bed.

I may as well tell you now, what we of necessity did not know till long afterwards, that our father, deprived of the gentle hand,



which had led him where none other could have driven, lost his balance, and made ducks and drakes of his money. Uncle wrote for him to come home, but no; he was obstinate and sanguine, and there he remained till the grave claimed him seven years after. They said his death was hastened by the smashing of some concern in which nearly all his money was placed. All that passed into Uncle's hands, and was by him secured to us, brings us in each £20 per annum.

We had bidden adieu to Miss Good long ago, and lived with Uncle very happily. Ada, his only surviving child, had dutifully deserted her father in his old age, for a priest in holy orders in the Church of England, and repaired with him to his tabernacle.

It was a sweet, tranquil life we led with the dear old gentleman, who had been a father to us from the day he kissed us on the quay. Ned had some appointment in the City, pending an opening abroad, and intervening years had not robbed him by one iota



of his boyish frankness and generosity, but added considerably to his personal charms and intelligence. No better brother ever lived than honest, manly Ned ; and I have yet to tell of the bitterest sorrow in my life—so far.

The opening arrived in February, and Ned sailed for Canada in April ; but ere his foot had touched the soil he was stricken by fever, and my dearly-loved brother found a grave in a strange land. See how we are divided : father and mother in Demerara, Ned in Canada, Memie in the old church-yard at Harrow, and Bell and I with a resting-place yet to find. This part of my story is shadowed ; I cannot help it, you need not read it unless you choose.

Our life was, perhaps, a monotonous one, it suited me better than Bell ; she always had much energy and strength of will ; still, she declined all offers of marriage, some made by eligible parties. When I told her she was like the “Lady of the Lea” she laughed



scornfully, and tossed her proud head. She in her turn informed me that I am like Uncle in my methodical habits and love of seclusion.

Perhaps I am ; I know I got on with, and loved him more than my own father. I used to sit with him in his study when Bell was out. He always worked till half-past eleven each night, at which time Jane appeared in the doorway and announced, "Half-past eleven, Sir," and then he ceased. The same thing occurred regularly and without deviation, and I liked sitting in the perfect hush and watching him cast up the pyramids of neat, diminutive figures with one filbert nail keeping the line in his eye, or penning long documents rapidly and flawlessly. I admire ability, I bow to it and beauty, nothing else ; I reverence, worship the first ; I acknowledge, court the second. Had my Uncle possessed no other quality, I should have honoured him for his genius.

Enough : I am not fit to chant the praise of so worthy and clever a man. Had he but



lived, things would have been different ; I had never been chatting to you, for I should have had nothing to tell. But he died, not in bed, watched over and expectedly, but alone and unexpectedly. One night the old servant went as usual to say, " Half-past eleven, Sir," but the Angel of Death had stood in that doorway before Jane, and beckoned Henry Boucher to the land where no time is kept.

Thus Bell and I were cut adrift, adrift in more senses than one, for it transpired that our Uncle had died without making a will, and all his property reverted naturally to his child Ada, who does *not* possess the bump of generosity.

Out of the apathy caused by our only relation's sudden demise, we were roused by the offer of a home from a Mr. Pole, of Lea Hurst, Sussex, an old friend of Uncle's, reputed rich, and who had retired from business, and taken to farming as an amusement. We had been in the habit of seeing him since we came to Cavendish Square ; he stayed at



Uncle's frequently, and always took an interest in us, and we liked him for a jovial man, with merry eyes and a bald head. He asked us once to go and stop with him and toss hay, but Uncle said he could not spare us; then he invited Ned, who, he fancied, would get on better, because of his son Dunstan; but Uncle made another excuse, and the subject was not in our presence again revived. This incident took place many years before Uncle's death.

In a state of much thankfulness we accepted Mr. Pole's offer. I don't fancy either of us saw any further than the present. I am an awful coward, I am afraid of strangers and talking people, and I would have done anything to escape from the lectures of our cousin by marriage, the Reverend Amos Meekly, whose tedious, pharisaical sermons, oddly enough made all the light to shine on himself, and only contained one injunction for us, viz. : "Don't be cast down."

Our cousin Ada presented us each with a



bookmarker, advising us as follows: "Bear your crosses meekly." I left mine in the house; perhaps it was prized by the incoming tenant, I was only too pleased to be done with such canting stinginess. Mr. Pole met us at the station, and received us and our belongings (Nana included) with genuine warmth. We drove to Lea Hurst in a conveyance of some kind, in which we all sat round most sociably.

"Lea Hurst" was the name of Mr. Pole's place, and except that it is more isolated, old-fashioned, and slovenly than the generality of gentlemen's houses, I do not know of any peculiarity about it. It sported no such grandeur as a carriage drive, it stood some distance up the farm-yard, in a garden accessible by an iron gate red with rust. The structure was of stone, straggling and irregular, being in some places two storeys high, in others a dwarfed *one*. The garden was large, well stocked, ill-kept. Mr. Pole was Irish, and his household servants consisted



of Mrs. Mulroy and her husband ; the former was housekeeper, the latter boots, gardener, groom, &c. There was plenty of everything at Lea Hurst, save order, and Bell and I scarcely knew what to make of such a state of things, coming fresh from a well-regulated establishment like Uncle's.

But the novelty was the best thing for us, and our first hearty laugh since our bereavement was at the exploits of a herd of swine in the garden with Mrs. Mulroy in hot pursuit. Nana held her mouth ajar for three days after.

It is needful to say something about the interior of the house. The floors were mostly flagged or bricked, and not one apartment furnished either plentifully or tastefully. There was a sitting room devoted to our exclusive use when we chose to appropriate it. It was a middle apartment, with two windows facing each other, and commanding a view of both garden and court-yard. The court yard was behind, and had in it the dairyman's cottage, a vane, and some twenty



swallows' nests. The flags were nicely whitened, and the walls coloured buff; and at one side I speedily hung my photograph of Ned, taken just before he sailed. It is the only picture in *this* room. The house was terribly damp, and the cupboards in the recesses smelt horridly musty, while the piano put there especially for us, boasted the rare and undesirable possession of Z's, and Q sharps. Bell did her best to tune it, and collected all the beer keys in the place, but it was a fruitless effort, and quickly abandoned. The tuner came to that benighted region once a year, and then left his ear behind him, and recollected no system. Our bedroom was over our sitting room, Nana's next door, and a spacious corridor ran across, with deformed rooms and garret stairs. The man who planned Lea Hurst had found himself master of more space than he knew what to do with. But to retrace my steps.

The first evening we did little more than go to bed; it was spring, almost summer, and I



conclude the vermin were proud of their offspring, for the rats kept up a continual race in the walls all night, and their scraping and squealing was not a lullaby to me. The next morning at breakfast I was astonished to meet only Mr. Pole, I wondered where Dunstan was. I wondered till I was forced to ask.

“Mr. Pole, where is your son?”

The smile fled from his face, and I repented my curiosity sincerely.

“In Australia, my dear; he has been there seven years. Childen are a great trouble, Georgie. But you will not be without a beau; my godson is here, and likely to remain till Christmas, I am glad to say. He has gone with my bailiff to buy some beasts, and won’t be home till late.”

It *was* late, so late that we did not see him that day, but the following morning he appeared at breakfast.

Cecil Frankly was young, good-tempered and handsome; I liked him for his beauty and genial nature, also for his strong resemblance



to poor Ned, not alone in face, but in disposition. Bell saw the likeness too, but it did not warm her heart like mine, she had never loved our brother as I had. I was making the coffee when he entered lovable-looking and bright, clad in velveteen coat and buckskins; I was sitting at the head of the board, I always take precedence of beautiful Bell in such ordinary matters. We felt friendly towards each other instantly, and I heard him remark to Mr. Pole afterwards that it was a pity I had such a "leaden complexion."

His hairless face evinced feebleness of character, and in everything, even to the light, straggling locks that always had a tumbled appearance, I was reminded of Ned. Cecil's was the nature that remains fresh long, that time has respect for, and many of his remarks were more innocent and amusing than sensible. What would have been impudence in the mouth of another was "prattle" coming from him, and it would have been unreasonable to be offended with such a child as he.



## CHAPTER IV.

OUR sitting-room was not entirely ours henceforth, he made some pretence for coming at first, but afterwards coolly knocked and entered. I was not surprised: he was strangely out of place at Lea Hurst, and showed it. His manner gave me the impression that he was a "mother's boy," and when he asked me one day—

"Why do you make this your home, Miss Georgie?"

I replied—"For want of a better—and now, why do you stay here?"

"Oh, to learn; and this place is as good as any other; I like Mr. Pole, you know, and my mother likes him. I expect to make a rattling good farmer some day."

I thought it was just as well he specified



no particular time for arriving at the state of perfection.

"You are very fond of your mother, Mr. Cecil?"

"I should just think I was."

I was silent; it might have been Ned who spoke.

The kettle of a piano now groaned under his thumps, though I *did* like to hear him sing; "Home they brought her warrior dead." Bell rarely played or sang in his presence, yet whenever she amused me I saw his great figure near, sitting under one window or the other. He followed her like a dog, obediently, and I perceived the chain that held him—her will.

I gazed at them often in that flagged room, standing chatting side by side, and I thought what a handsome couple they made: he with his muscular strength and indolent countenance, she with her slender limbs and expressive, powerful face. I knew Bell thought of him as she did of Ned—something that annoyed



her by its feebleness, and yet for which she felt sincere pity. Pity is said to be akin to love—I don't believe it, but I do believe that curiosity is the progenitor of many a lie—"ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no stories."

It was a pleasant life we led, though sometimes I fancied I was in the way, and never more than one day when we had strayed upon the hill and been joined by Cecil, when we sat down to rest. He was in one of his babyish, petulant moods, not knowing what he wanted, and feeling dreadfully cross. Bell was beautiful, tranquil as usual, and gazing away over the rich land, smiling. His hands tore up the herbage ruthlessly, and presently he held a tuft out to me, asking—

"Do you know what this is, Miss Georgie?"

"No."

"Toddle-grass." I took the hint, and rose.

"No, Miss Georgie, indeed I did not mean that," (I read the falsehood in his eye) "please don't go!"



"What are you two disagreeing about?" enquired Bell, roused from her dream.

"It's Miss Georgie; she's so short-tempered."

"Nay," interrupted Bell quietly, "I think it is you, Mr. Cecil."

"Well, I daresay I am" (looking awfully spoony at the averted face). "Where's the good of staying here? let's go, Miss Georgie."

I dragged myself up, half wishing that he had not met us, for we should have enjoyed our rest on the hill better without him. But I afterwards discovered that our meetings were not altogether due to chance; he had a tolerable notion of our whereabouts, for I noticed him bounding like a deer over the felled timber in the wood, when we chanced to be rambling there. I concluded he had seen us enter, and wanted to hear if we spoke of him, which we very frequently did. He many times had a double meaning in what he said, which Bell never betrayed the least sign of having perceived.

Coming down the slope there was a water-



cutting, and by accident Bell and he had it between them.

"See, we are divided, Miss Boucher ; give me your hand, and I'll help you across."

"No," responded Bell, coldly.

I saw she was thinking of something else, and I regretted the disappointment visible in his face. Then his mood took an extraordinary turn ; he tried to rouse her by jealousy, speaking in the most flattering and expressive terms of some cousin who had sent him her photograph, and drew a letter and a withered rose out of his breast-pocket, declaring he would not part with either for a hundred pounds.

I recognised the rose as one Bell had given him a week or two before. She never glanced at the rubbish, and remarked to me afterwards that she supposed he would marry his fair cousin. He evidently did not understand Bell ; he thought her dreadfully heartless, and it made me wild to hear him, knowing



as I did the strong affection which lay hidden under that proud bearing and callous appearance. Where he would have cried and loved hotly for a month, she would have been still, and yet loved for years, making no murmur, taking no rest, but slaving day and night, putting her entire soul into the work, determined to succeed, and asking nothing better than to cast her hard-earned gains at the feet of those she succoured and loved. She *has* done it.

Ah, Bell ! my brave darling, every smile, on my face, every comfort around me, have been brought by your youth and courage ! It was in that old farm-house that she decided to become an actress, that inspiration lighted her beautiful face.. She knew she had the power lying dormant, so did I ; she had acted at Miss Good's, and made me turn-pale. Inexperienced though I was, her acting had spoken to me by the force of its reality, and I dreamt a golden dream for my sister. But the notion of *action* unarmed me at once, and,



coward-like, I turned from it. Not so Bell. She had precisely that strength of mind, that heart of oak, which is intended by God to equal and to make up for, the total lack of money, influence, friends. She has the courage of William Wallace? but I am getting out of my depth.

Passing up the yard, we chanced on one of the beasts, loose, and Cecil Frankly asked—

“What should you do if that bull ran at you, Miss Boucher?”

“Push you first,” retorted Bell, wickedly.

I chuckled; I knew she would, that was how she treated Ned, drove him before her, and then commanded him how to act. We found each other's society very desirable; even Mr. Pole became more sociable, and smoked in our sitting room sometimes, after requesting our permission. The management of the house had also improved. Nana's excellent training stood her in good stead, and new fashions had been introduced, which added considerably to the comfort and order.



I saw that Mr. Pole was pleased, and he told us one day that he had not been so happy for years. Would that it could have lasted ; I liked having them in our room with their pipes, I liked Cecil's frank face by my side, and I said exactly what I chose to the big fellow. I told you at first that I had a sharp tongue.

One night he was fractious; Bell's calmness appeared to irritate him, and while expressing his opinion upon some matter under discussion, he grasped the lid of one eye in his pipe-case, and pulled it. I watched till I felt conscious that I could not endure another second, and so replied—

“I dare say you do, but you need not pull the lid off your eye ; put that pipe-case down.”

They all laughed, Mr. Pole roared, and Cecil obeyed. He knew I liked him right well, and I did truly. I feel no shame in confessing it; I have never been what is called in love, I never shall be ; don't forget



- that I am a cripple, *I* never do, and my poor doubled-up leg stands between me and all men. This perfect freedom from "self consciousness" makes me quite at my ease with gentlemen. I speak to them as to a woman, indeed, more readily and freely, and the brightest, *youngest* love I ever felt was for Ned and Cecil Frankly. I have told you about Lea Hurst, but nothing of its neighbourhood or neighbours.

The first was all grand hills, scored by sheep-tracks, and deeply rutted high-backed roads; the second not any nearer us than a good mile, and the queerest family any one ever tramped that distance to behold. They were so-so in manner as in appearance, though one daughter had the reputation of possessing a pretty face and pretty hand, in right of which latter perfection, she was always caressing her brooch.

- These damsels *raked* their hair (that is the only expressible word I know for it) and rejoiced in the euphonius name of Mickleberry



—it ought to have been Muddleberry. Cecil Frankly drove us there one afternoon to tea, and on the way informed us that Mrs. Mickleberry was “*awfully* queer.”

This young man either felt or professed to feel, disbelief in the durability of love, he maintained that not half was lasting or sincere and cited the display of affection made by Mr. and Mrs. Mickleberry, which he was sure must be sham, as it never *could* have stood so many years. He asked Bell if she believed in true love, and received a “No!” in her matter-of-fact tone, which had the effect of reducing his face to a transient state of abject misery. By the pose of her mouth I knew she was calculating how much of the genuine passion *he* was capable of feeling.

The evening at the Mickleberry’s was terribly heavy, and the only redeeming point was a piece of Cecil’s innocent impudence.

“Mrs. Mickleberry,” began the drawling tones—then turning to me he enquired, “Shall I say it, Georgie?”



"Oh, yes! say it if you like, Cecil," replied I.

"Mrs. Mickleberry, you don't love Mr. Mickleberry, do you?"

I thought the good lady's eyes would have bolted out of her head.

"I mean," proceeded unabashed Cecil, pushing the contents of his pipe further down with one shapely finger, "you don't love him as you did when you were married."

"Yes," responded that devout lady, "I love him Mr. Mickleberry *quite* as much, Mr. Cecil."

Cecil looked incredulous, and the Mickleberry's pious.



## CHAPTER V.

MY health improved at Lea Hurst, I became very much stronger, and learnt some nice culinary concoctions from Mrs. Mulroy, who was a capital cook. The kitchen was a cheerful apartment fronting the yard, and I liked rolling up the paste, with the window open, and tossing stray scraps to the fowls that clucked beneath, while the fresh, sweet breeze blew in from the hazy hills, and the bees robbed the apple-blossom, thorn and columbine, Bell had put in the old yellow mug on the sill. She used to come and loll by the table, laughing at me playing cook with my sleeves turned up, and then burst into wild snatches of song, which echoed in and out the eaves of the buildings as if loath to part, making the hearts of those who listened, beat quicker.



Dangerously beautiful she looked those summer days, in all the wealth of her awakened power, and the whispers that reached her stirred soul and lighted her eyes with the fire of genius, deadened her senses to the timid pleading of others.

With the summer had come the tuner, and the piano had assumed a better tone. When twilight gathered softly, with a reluctance that made me sad, when the flowers closed their eyes in sleep, and the dew started like diamonds to the tips of the grass, Bell's rich cultivated voice and nimble fingers formed a contrast to drooping nature, and turned the current of my thoughts. The strong passion that escaped in her music sometimes startled my peace; she astonished me, she bewitched another.

Nightly the fair face of Cecil Frankly met my eyes, his muscular figure crouched under the laurels that skirted the orchard, and I marvelled if his mother's reign was not well-nigh over. He showed reluctance to quit the



house even for a day; and many a sunny morning I saw him standing, his broad back propped against the worn stone, and his bright hair fluttering over the cracks in the barn door, whistling, "O would I were a bird," or talking to Mulroy.

I don't know whether Bell recollects him so well as I, I fancy not; the constant excitement and variation of her life must tread under foot past days, her strong, independent nature cannot be expected to cling like mine. But when I mention him, I see a softer light creep into her eyes, and the voice is very gentle which says, "Poor Cecil!" She, like myself, regrets not having his portrait, particularly as all appeals to the artist have proved fruitless.

July waned, disappeared, and with the first day in August another claimed the hospitality of Lea Hurst. The peg, peg of my crutch was a familiar sound in the courtyard at dusk; I strayed by myself, dreaming and idle. Sometimes I found Nana there,



chatting to the dairyman, and sometimes Cecil. But, this first of August, Cecil, Mr. Pole, and the bailiff were on the hill at the farm, thrashing the old year's grain to make room for the new. There was a small farm attached to Lea Hurst on the other side of the hill, where nearly all the fowls were kept, and part of the sheep. Bell had been to it in a waggon, with Cecil; I had preferred not undergoing the jolting, and the account she rendered of it did not make me repent my decision.

Cecil went to witness the thrashing, as being part of his farming education. Mr. Pole said that after setting his dogs to clear the ricks of rats he fell asleep, and had to be roused for the journey home. I quite forgot to enquire if he walked in his day-sleep, for big Cecil Frankly was a somnambulist. It was one of the first things Mr. Pole told us of when we arrived; it was a fact known to every one in the house, and about which we had many a laugh. Cecil



could not credit that he made half the noise that we said he did, but owned to playing some queer pranks with the furniture in his chamber. His room was across the corridor, down a passage, and shut in by a swing door; it was one of Lea Hurst's "projections," built out into the court-yard, and the only back sleeping apartment at that end of the house. Often Mr. Pole went to his room and aroused him. His perambulations extended all over the place; I met him stalking about one night, candle in hand, and could hardly believe that he slept, but for the fixed eyes and hard breathing as he passed me.

Have you ever seen a somnambulist? The power is something contrary to belief unless you have. They are as decided in their movements as if awake, and adjust everything with as much nicety; unlocking doors, opening drawers, and returning things to their right places, never making a false step. I believe that, left to themselves, they will



come to no harm, and the only fatalities my interest in this matter have brought to my knowledge have been traceable to some ill-timed interference.

The court-yard was deserted this evening, and I strayed with pardonable fondness by the gateway that led into the meadow. The sounds came distinctly on the still air, carrying with them some idea of the scenes which gave them birth ; the faint " Cub, cub " from some cow-man calling the animals in, the creaking of the windlass at the cottages over the river, as they drew the water for supper, and the far-off yelping of Cecil's dogs under the misty hill, coming home.

Bell was writing to a schoolfellow in Prussia, who, possessed of a bilious complexion had gone to the officers' ball in a rose-coloured silk, over which combination we had enjoyed a hearty laugh. So I had nothing to do but cool my brow and air my imagination. If I had been up in the seventh heaven, and picturing some prince in disguise



prostrate amongst the buttercups and daisies, at my feet, suing for my hand and heart, I should have been rather cut up to behold the manner of creature who *was* standing ankle-deep in the grass near me,

I was not enchanted, but *terrified* to find myself the object of fixed attention from the most vagrant specimen of mankind I had ever beheld. Don't suppose that the fellow had dropped from the clouds, or been disgorged by the earth; no such miracle had been wrought, he had simply come up the foot-path unnoticed by me. He was a tramp; and Mr. Pole disapproved of their being encouraged, so I turned.

"Stop!" ordered the vagabond.

I felt disposed to say "Shan't!" but checked myself, and replied without looking round—

"I haven't anything for you, go away!" and limped off at the top of my pegging speed, which was increased, I scarcely know how, by hearing him behind me. My flying leaps



must have resembled those of the witch on the broomstick, and with a crimson face, and palpitating heart, I darted into the kitchen to Mrs. Mulroy and Nana.

“A man!” intelligibly spoke I, making Nana drop her iron. No explanation from me was required, for the individual was behind, and coolly dropped into a chair.

“How dare you?” began the housekeeper, wrathfully, but a “Don’t you know me, Mother Mulroy?” caused her indignation to melt into a half-horrified—

“Power o’ my soul! it’s Musther Dunstan!”

Lal la! my not-to-be-encouraged tramp was the “prodigal son!” A few more witch-like leaps, and I was by Bell’s side, gasping it out, and affixing to her handsome countenance the blankest stare of amazement.

“Georgie, are you *sure*? Mr. Pole’s son.”

“Quite sure, Bell; he’s sitting in the kitchen chair in an old, battered, felt wide-awake; he—”



There he was !

“Who are you?” He addressed self-possessed Bell.

“Sir!” said she, drawing herself up like a queen, “I am Isabel Boucher, and this is my sister Georgiana.” With a half-rusted grace he removed his wide-a-wake, and I was obliged to allow that he looked better without it. A man, tall, thin, supple, with black curling hair, fine features, the lower part of which was smothered in a well-grown beard, dark blue eyes, white, pointed teeth, age about three-and-thirty: such was Dunstan Pole.

A sniffing sound aroused me, and I shrieked aloud on discovering a dog with fierce red eyes standing by me.

“O call your dog! call your dog!”

Past, present terror, all combined to unnerve me, and a hasty movement jerking my crutch from under me, I fell heavily to the ground. He reached me before Bell, and set me up, first using my crutch to chastise



Viper, who rolled himself into a ball like a hedgehog, and whimpered.

At this point Mr. Pole and Cecil entered hurriedly. The meeting between father and son I shall not easily forget, it was a piece of the most painful affection I ever witnessed. Bright Cecil stood in the doorway, and I crawled to the protection of his strong arm, trembling. He kindly put one sledge-hammer of a limb round me, and I thought his velvet coat the softest pillow I had ever known.

"I'll take care of you, Georgie," said he.

What a disparity! Cecil with his good-tempered, fearless face, the prodigal's sullen, dark—truly they were "Night" and "Morning."

The return of Mr. Pole's son was kept rather quiet at first, because he had no presentable clothes (he said he had lost his luggage, which, not crediting myself, I cannot expect you to) and a few days elapsed before



the tailor completed the order ; meanwhile he wore some of Cecil's, which he was a good way from filling. He became friendly with me sooner than with the others, and his Irish wit made the old place prick up its ears. I did not dislike him in the least, and I tried to make amends for my rudeness to him at first. Dunstan Pole had been well educated, and well started in life, but the attractions of gay Dublin proved too many for his conceit, and he made himself over to the bottle. Drink had been his ruin, like many another man's, till at last his father, wearied and ashamed, shipped him off to Australia, and there he had remained seven years, honouring his parent with an epistle once in eighteen months.

I don't fancy I am wide of the mark in stating that his father was amply satisfied with these sparing letters, and desired them to come no oftener. Dunstan he never anticipated seeing again, and Cecil Frankly had a stout account at Mr. Pole's bankers, so most



probably his kind hand would have ruled at Lea Hurst after his godfather. I now understood why uncle had objected to Ned's visiting Mr. Pole, and I silently prayed that Cecil, with his feeble will and poetic fancies, might be strong enough to resist temptation.

I have told you that Cecil Frankly had the *entrée* to our sitting room, and we could not make an open distinction and forbid Dunstan Pole, our benefactor's son, so they both came, likewise Viper, who, next to his master, revered me; or my crutch more likely. It not being my business, I could not ask people what they thought of Dunstan Pole, and the only two who were generous enough to volunteer their opinions were Bell and Nana. The first spoke of him and his dog as "an ill-conditioned pair." His abruptness offended her fastidious taste, his badly-kept nails were an eye-sore to her; she despised, loathed the creature from the moment he entered the house, yet she betrayed it not. Only I, who had known her all her life, perceived by the



frigid politeness and utter indifference of her bearing towards him, that he had a no more elevated position in her estimation, and received no more consideration than the pigs in the sty.

The second showed the whites of her eyes, and said—

“O, Miss Georgie! de Lord hab neber knock at de door of his heart. Old Satan keep guard dere.”



## CHAPTER VI.

MR. POLE now avoided the sociable evenings, and I felt truly sorry for the old man ; his son seemed to crush him. Cecil got on very well with Dunstan, and once went to market in his company, but only once. Dunstan related to us what had occurred on that occasion between Cecil and some innkeeper. The man, half drunk, was insolent, upon which that Goliath of a Cecil turned to him with—

“You drunken rustic! you intoxicated publican! say another word, and I’ll knock you through that door!”

The “other word” was not said, and Cecil, quiet as a lamb, languidly remarked—

“That brute of a Homer!”

I drew my own inference, that such company was more congenial to the taste of



Dunstan Pole than, to that of highly-bred Cecil Frankly.

Sometimes Dunstan absented himself; went, so he said, to see the neighbours, and we revelled in his absence. Mr. Pole alone was ill at ease, and on such occasions paced the garden. One night the cause of his disquietude was made known. We three were in the room, I hidden in the far window, Bell and Cecil by the piano. I think they forgot my presence. Bell had just been playing beautifully, and Cecil asked her age. She half hesitated; she never willingly told it, and he guessed twenty-three.

“No, you are a year in advance.”

“O! I am so glad; then I am the elder, I am twenty-four in September.”

I could not understand why he was pleased. Then he began to strum “When other lips and other hearts,” presently breaking off to ask somewhat pettishly—

“Why don’t you say something, Miss Boucher?”



Bell's tone was laughing.

"What would you like me to say?"

"Nothing," replied he, impetuously, at which Bell laughed outright.

My heart ached for the poor fellow; she was punishing him cruelly and unintentionally. He was not decided and brave enough for her. I don't believe she knew when he was in earnest, his nature was so contrary to her own. That night I heard him tell her he loved her, and she merely answered, "Do you!" his meaning seemed to have glided away from her understanding, he was powerless to rouse the rich love that lay at the bottom of her heart. All women do not tremble and flutter at every breath of love which reaches them; some grow pale and stony, and the swell never rises to the surface—such is the case with the proud heart of Bell Boucher. It is the same nature that in its greatest agony, keenest sorrow, refuses to be looked at, and who shall say they do not suffer? Yet Cecil Frankly thought she did



not, could not love, because she made no sound, and he could not read her soul.

I was glad when Mr. Pole came in, I crept out of my corner. Cecil was silent, staring at unconscious Bell with tearful eyes, and for the first time I thought him very stupid, more stupid than Ned was, but then, to be sure, I never saw Ned "spoony." I am certain people are more or less idiots when in love. Conversation flagged, and I drew down the blinds.

At ten o'clock there was a strange sound in the kitchen, and Mr. Pole rose, only in time to receive his beast of a son at the door, *drunk*. Yes, the plain disgusting term is more applicable to Dunstan Pole's state than any other. He was not inebriated partly, but entirely and altogether—he was blind drunk. What a horrid, sickening spectacle! I could not have touched him with the end of a clothes-prop! How a woman can degrade herself by ministering to a drunken husband is past my comprehension; I should be



strongly tempted to relieve the world of his disgusting presence. Some one put *this* wretch in a place of safety, for he was alive in the morning. Dunstan Pole now made a beast of himself not less than twice in a week, which seemed nothing worthy of remark to the seasoned Mulroy, for I heard him tell Nana that he perfectly well remembered sitting up every night for a fortnight with "Masther Dunstan." He was past redemption, that was quite clear, by his perfect callousness, and actually referred to his indisposition as the "colonial dries."

Bell bowed to him now, never offered her hand, and I saw a terrible cloud gather on his brow, which boded no good. As much as his numbed feelings could be appealed to they had been, and by queenly Bell. His brute instinct was roused to covetousness, he coveted my sister. A curl of her lip checked him when nought else would, his admiration was mingled with fear.

Against such a man Cecil showed to special



It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name.

“That it was you in the garden? No, she gives you credit for better sense than to spend your time prowling in bushes, cat-fashion.”

“What can he envy me of?”

“Your better conscience and bright face.”

“Is that all?”

He had hoped I would say—“Bell’s love,” but I dared utter no such deluding hope, she had not made me her confidant.

After this dog scene, Dunstan was shy with me, but equally friendly towards Cecil. Harvesting had been prosperous, and a general rejoicing was held by the farmers.

The Mickleberry’s “harvest home,” was to be given at the end of September, and out of consideration to their daughters, it assumed the form of a ball. It was a perpetual subject for discussion, and Bell, Cecil, Dunstan and I had been asked; I should go as an elder, and look on. Bell had laughed at the



idea of going, but Cecil begged her to, and I suggested that the Mickleberry's might think it queer if she did not, so she gave in, and Nana was at that moment ironing out our white muslin dresses for it; the ball came off the next night. We felt particularly free, there being no men at home. Mr. Pole was at a farm dinner, Mulroy with him, and Cecil and Dunstan were duck-shooting on the river by moonlight, and no one knew when they would return. I was perfectly at ease till Nana came in at half-past ten, to say something to Bell about her flounces, and then I heard a man's voice in the kitchen.

"Who's that, Nana?"

"Wood, Miss Georgie."

"Wood! why, he went with the gentlemen in the boat!"

"Yes, but Massa Dunstan he sent him back."

I turned faint; I had a horror of Cecil being alone with Dunstan Pole. I sat on, thinking, working myself up into an agony. I



pictured them alone in the boat—no human hand, no human eye near, nothing but the liquid light from on high, silvering the cold rushes—silent, watching for the birds. Who was there to tell the dark story? what was there to stand between “Night and Morning?” what a temptation for that Godless man! I could endure it no longer; I would seek the dairywoman’s son, and bribe him to follow them. I limped on; I had almost reached the door of the cottage, when I saw a tall figure in a straw hat striding over the fold-gate, and a glad cry broke from me, “Cecil! Cecil!”

“Why, Georgie, what brings you here?”

I had pressed up to him eagerly.

“Take care, I am soaking.”

“Soaking!” echoed I, “what have you been about?”

“Nothing, only the boat (so Dunstan says) caught against a sunken stake, and pitched me out. The best of it was, Georgie, he never missed me, and I had to paddle ever so



far, but it did not matter, because I can swim like a fish. However, I decided to come home and get these clothes off, for it's coolish on the water to-night."

I caught one of his beautiful hands and kissed it, my voice was so full of tears that I dared not speak. He was only just freed from the jaws of death, and he believed his ducking to be accidental. I could have knelt in the court-yard and returned thanks for his deliverance. He did not rejoin Dunstan; I coaxed him to stay, and Bell sang to him till Mr. Pole returned.

The next night was the Mickleberry's dance. We all went in the conveyance with its hood on, and I deemed it but a sorry carriage for beautiful Bell and knightly Cecil; they demanded a better, I scarcely knew which looked best, they made such a handsome couple.

Bell reigned supreme, and she was called the "Harvest Queen," on account, I believe, of her dress, which was arranged with her



naturally artistic grace. The material was simple white muslin, like my own, but a few hours before donning them, Bell became conscious of a deficiency. She had not an atom of ribbon but black, and that I decidedly objected to for her. I was aghast; I wanted her to eclipse all.

"Don't cry, Georgie!" laughed she, "I'll manage."

In a short time she returned, she *had* managed, managed to twine together three lovely bunches of wheat, corn flowers, poppies and vine-leaves. I was not surprised at the admiration which greeted her. She looked truly beautiful leaning on Cecil's arm at the top of the dance, a queen among those country girls with their glowing cheeks and dappled arms. Cecil was correct in saying—

"Your sister looks out of place here, Georgie."

She did, and I could hardly endure to see her in the grasp of a lout of a man who, having passed all his days striding over



ploughed fields, danced, or rather romped, like a cart horse, and whose clothes looked as if they had been thrown on him with a pitchfork. But I enjoyed sitting in my corner and watching the motley crowd plunging and bouncing about in the Mickleberry's barn, which was not badly decorated for the occasion.

The little bits of yellow finery and scant manners that were aired there amused me, and the perfumes used in that primitive ball-room, seemed to be principally camphor and lavender. All the gloves were calf-skin, with one dwarfed thumb, and every damsel had on a coloured sash and her mother's brooch.

Bell and Cecil came and sat by me several times, her animated face turned to me, her round, white arm linked in mine. She charmed me, she charmed others, her witchery was too powerful to resist; now it was the laughing eyes, now the defiant toss of the superb head with its burnished coils of thick hair



twisted and looped amongst the cool vine-leaves, each helping to reveal the delicate texture of that transparent skin. The others twined round like spinning-tops, hot, excited, red. She glided with a floating, supple motion over the rough barn floor, as if swaying in the air, her simple dress floating round her like a cloud. I heard one old man standing in the doorway, say fervently—

“God bless her bonny face; she takes one’s breath away, she do.”

My heart beat, I was so proud! *my* sister, my Bell! Cecil was more with her than any other in the room, and they looked well suited. “Sir Roger de Coverley,” was danced prettily, and the young people themselves better acquainted with the old-fashioned running step. Instead of two joining hands for the other couples to pass under, a half-hoop had been made of wheat and roses; this the first two held aloft, while the rest trooped merrily under, and the musicians played with a will, beating their feet in unison with the



many that footed it on the boards, and the candles fixed round the walls amongst the evergreens and brown calico, reeled in their sockets and flickered in the wind the dancers raised.

Now it is *their* turn to hold the hoop, and I see their bright, happy faces bent to each other as they whisper something with a perfect air of understanding, but the pleasure I feel in their happiness, is checked by hearing a fierce oath uttered near me—Dunstan Pole is the blasphemer.



## CHAPTER VII.

IN the gray dawn we go home, and an hour later make a pretence of sleeping, but I hear Cecil's footsteps and smell his pipe as he paces the garden below. And then I creep from Bell's side softly, and lie down by the open window, watching the spaces of light grow wider and wider, and the sun rising from his bed behind the hill. When his first ray has reached Bell's sleeping face, I hear Cecil springing upstairs; he his going to take off his dress clothes, I conclude.

We are one short at breakfast—Dunstan has gone in the waggon to Shepley. We dissipated ones, idle to-day, sit under the trees and chatter of the previous night's doings, and by dint of much persuading, we get Cecil to go and enquire after the health of the



Misses Mickleberry. Then Bell muses, and rocks me in her motherly arms; she says I am tired. Just before supper there is one of those frequent fumbblings in the passage, which so graphically delineate Dunstan Pole's condition, and I hear Cecil mutter "beast!" under his breath. I limp out to find Mulroy, and prevent the creature entering our room. Mrs. Mulroy is doing her best to fill her husband's place, but Dunstan is particularly obstinate, and will not mount the stairs.

"I will send Wood to help you; Mrs. Mulroy," said I.

To do this, I am compelled to conquer my aversion and pass close to the wretch. I pass, and observe that his left eye does not droop to-night as usual, also that there is a total absence of odour, and I never knew there was any strong liquor minus that before, when taken to excess.

We go to bed early, but not to rest. Bell says she has something to tell me first, and I sit outside the bed to listen.



"We must leave here, Georgie," begins she, abruptly.

"What for, Bell?"

"Why? because men *will* be foolish. Cecil has told me seriously that he loves me."

"And what did you say to him?"

"Nothing definite; I was surprised, and made no clear reply. But—never mind, we will go. He won't break his heart."

"I don't suppose he will, Bell; answer me candidly, do you love him?"

She drew nearer, her face thoughtful, and sat down beside me.

"Little sister, you do well to ask, for that question is puzzling me. Georgie, I have never thought of Cecil in that way, and I fancy my love for him is not what it should be, not sufficient. It is by no means an 'all-absorbing' feeling, as that moon-struck Rose called it. I like him, I *love* him, but I could not *obey* him; I do not recognise him as my master, I should not trust him to lead me.



Georgie, I am afraid it is not what it ought to be, and I regret that we came here."

I sighed. Poor Cecil ! I wished he had not loved high-minded Bell. She was too honest to deceive either herself or him, and too cautious to take a doubtful step. I know he was not her equal mentally, and that prevented the confidence and submission to his will, the want of which Bell was conscious of, and mentioned. I was aware that all his wooing had been lost upon her ; that she had never contemplated such a thing arising, that she cared for him merely as for a friend, a brother. But might she not be happier with a man she could guide than with one to guide her ? She was not the woman to be ruled ; I believed the yoke would chafe her proud imperious spirit—that she would rebel. I had never seen my sister's master, a man able to rule her by force of attraction ; I have never seen him yet, he is "wanted" this day. I was dumb ; I could not advise, and I wished for sweet mother to lead her beautiful child.



Ah! it is in a storm like this that many crafts are wrecked for the want of a judicious, steady hand on the helm. It required an experienced hand to guide Bell, one that appreciated her wild, untamed nature, untamed because of its power; one who understood the construction of a heart at once passionate, impulsive, fond, dangerous! Yes, there is danger in a woman strong, talented, capable, like my sister. I know it, I have seen it, seen it rise and shake her in its grasp, that force of will which recognises no obstacle, that rush of ability which sweeps all before it, and makes its owner totter. I can say from my heart that it is well. I am a cripple, for my infirmity appeals to Bell's splendidly mighty nature, tones her strength down to gentleness, keeps open one vein of pity, one corner in her proud heart soft, and makes her's a beautiful life!

We kiss good night, we sleep, the moonbeams resting on the pillow beside us, while the bright face of him who has a hallowed



place in our memory is turned upward to the sorrowing stars; *his* pillow a stone. While his smiling lips christened her he loved the "Harvest Queen," Satan hating what he could not obtain, beckoned an agent, and together they planned his death.

Hush! blow gently, ye night winds, disturb not a tress of that wandering hair; dawn, creep round slowly, for this morn thy light is a mockery; it shows Death, Death in his hideousness and greed, claiming kindred with youth and hope, and no angel of mercy to stand between, with his young life full of promise battered out on those cruel stones—he lies dead—bright Cecil Frankly!

The lamentations, the horrified outcries, awoke us, and Bell opened the door to Nana, the bearer of ill tidings. It is a little use my attempting to be loquacious at this point, I cannot. The deadly sickness that crept over me then, creeps over me now, and equally vivid there rises in my memory the stony white face of Bell. Wood, the dairy-



woman's son had found him when crossing the court yard, and given the alarm. The window of his room being open, explained the fatality—he had got out in his sleep. I well remembered Mr. Pole twitting him about being half through the said window, and Wood pushing him in with the handle of a pitchfork. That was nonsense, of course, but how many true words are said in a joke. I was sore at heart; it was like Ned's second death, and I could not accept this stroke as coming from the hand of God.

Between me and resignation there arose suspicion, and the darkened face of Dunstan Pole. I sickened in his presence, I could not touch the food he looked at, so I made my feeble cry; it only needed that to rouse Bell, and we left Lea Hurst.

In our humble lodgings the training for the stage commenced; we had played before, now we acted, and I hobbled up and down, encouraging, criticising, condemning my brave-hearted sister as she rehearsed Meg



Merrilles to me and the poor, painted furniture. My ambition was kindled for the sake of the dead ; I wanted her to fulfil his vague hopes. She has. He loved, admired, believed her great in that obscure farm house, and what he esteemed and worshipped with all the force of his generous nature, not knowing the ability which she possessed, the world now admires and bows down to. Bright Cecil ! the light of your face has strayed into our home many times since your heart was chilled by that cold hand. In those same lodgings out of which Bell made her *début*, I opened my heart and showed her the weight I carried there, told her my belief that somnambulism never caused the death of Cecil Frankly, that Dunstan Pole cast him through the window, prompted by jealous hate. But it was the first, the last, the only time I ever did it, for I saw the lurid light, revenge, start to those deep eyes, I felt the grip of those slender fingers, and heard the voiceless cry that broke from that silent heart—"Blood for blood."



Ay, I did not know that his place was at the right hand before, and now I pray—"Let not Dunstan Pole cross her path!" Her strong nature hides her pain, when I speak she turns away her face, but her hands have placed alongside little Memie's lock of yellow hair a few shrivelled ears of wheat. I saw Dunstan Pole a short time since in the densely-packed pit; I had gone to see Bell in a new piece, and he had been drawn thither by the fame of "Miss Boucher." He recognised her, his face paled, and he left the theatre at the end of the second act. Poor wretch! how can he rest with a corpse slung round his neck? the sun never reaches a life shaded by sin. Hark! there is her footstep, her key is in the door. Good night!



FAIRY.







# FAIRY.

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## CHAPTER I.

NATURE was rocking herself to rest murmurless; the angel of night had brushed her silver wings over the white water-lily, and the yellow goat's beard, and hidden their beauty. The lazy river had sucked the rushes further in, a drowsy dragon-fly floated by. So still, so hushed, that vice forgot its errand, and laid aside its project, charmed by peace. Hark! a rustle, and musical chattering—a songster has fallen from out the ivy round the church, and awakened its fellows, that is all. Solitude once more. The breeze moves the lace curtains at the open windows of the Rectory, and a squirrel skips nimbly in the yew tree.



Creak, creak, click ! Creak, creak, click ! the squirrel straightway retires to the topmost branch, and draws up its bushy tail on the defensive. It is a juvenile, else it would not have retreated at that sound—it is only Fairy riding on the gate.

“How inelegant ! how unladylike !” soured Propriety, in the keeping of mother and sisters, would declare.

“How bewitching ! how irresistible !” says the unprejudiced gazer, with an understanding wide enough to embrace the beauty of innocence and untutored impulse. There is no thought reflected in those clear eyes that may not invite scrutiny, no smile on those sweetly-tempered lips, but that born of guileless, child-like delight ! So fresh, so young at heart is she, that life seems an elysium, into which new tints of beauty shoot each day. Fairy by name, Fairy by nature ; like an elf she sits perched on the barred gate, steadying herself by her tiny feet, to the banishment of all bronze from the slippers. Brown as a berry



is the merry, roguish, dimpled faced, intelligent, the brow over which the curly chesnut hair wanders, ere it submits to the restraint of the dark blue velvet knot, tied low in the scorched neck. The muslin dress clings to the small figure, lithe, supple, and full of a wild, untamed grace, more taking from its uniqueness than the carriage of a duchess. The eyes are candid, fearless, mirroring the abundant harvest that may be gathered from that rich understanding, the wealth of affection and faithfulness stored in that bounding susceptible heart. Fairy owes more to Nature than to aught else, and hers is that timid disposition which shies at its own whisperings. To know that other than He, who fashioned her to suit His will, could read her mind, would have crushed her bright, pure spirit to misery, and cramped the thoughts that took as high and wild flights as a startled bird. With hands demurely crossed she rides on, forgetful of parting injunctions from mamma,



and withering glances from papa. Her spirit is too wild for them ever to cage, their own too timid to let them follow after. It must be a strong, sympathising hand to lead that sensitive, high-toned nature on the lower road of life. Fairy is an enthusiast; every drop of blood in those veins is fired fifty times a day by imagination; kindly tears of compassion hang on the thick lashes when none are nigh to see. Her soul is stirred to agony by the plaintive call of the water hen, and her heart leaps and cries silently on the one being whom imagination and instinct bid her seek. Her life, unsheltered by any of fashion's artifices, feels every variation of temperature, frets and pines for companionship, longs for a kindred spirit—it cannot stand alone. Not to the women who throng the world, who stretch out their hands for their daily bread, does such a quivering, sensitive nature belong. No! there is a shield over the heart of every plodding woman-worker, a guard betwixt them and mankind, to par the thrusts so



unerringly made at them, and which their necessity seems to invite, rather than repel.

Fairy is the youngest child of the Reverend Robert Trafford, Rector of Boscobel, a village wrapped up between trees and hills to the left of Steyning. Sixteen Christmas days have been and gone since the one when she made her unexpected advent, scattered the family party, and cooked the goose to fiddle strings. The snow lay four inches deep upon the ground that day, and her family's affection failed to reach the tiny brown pilgrim, bound for the journey of life. Two were already entered for the race, Constance and Beatrice, well-drilled girls of ten and eleven, and Frances, the Christmas offering, was not received so thankfully as might have been.

Her abbreviation of name was due to a cousin, Alexander Stuart, who was put in the Hussars, and remained there till nearly swamped by liabilities; then he departed to Bombay, and exerted himself wonderfully to control the natives, which suggested to some-



body the desirability of rendering him a fixture. Accordingly it was done, and the Rector relieved thereby. Alexander owed a good deal to his uncle, and the only acknowledgment he had ever made to the austere old gentleman was to install himself nurse to the baby. Alex and his toddling companion spent hours lying on the grass, or sitting on some stile or gate, while the Captain puffed volumes of Cavendish smoke over the rumpled head. Very soothing to the man's weary state (he had lived every minute of his life since he obtained his commission in a turmoil of excitement) was the clinging preference of the child so peremptorily evinced, and, with the plump arms locked round his strong neck, a portion of the bitterness of remorse vanished. Nurse suddenly lost the power of speech when "six-feet-in-his-slippers" stood between her and a tiny defaulter in a torn frock.

"Don't scold, nurse, I ripped the dress," would affirm the man, with a hand stuck in



each pocket, taking the lie on his own broad back, "Fairy had nothing at all to do with it." And then he coolly took a seat on the table, taxing its strength cruelly, while the tattered garment was replaced by another.

Afterwards Fairy nearly caused the death of her mamma by appearing at the post-office in Steyning on Alex's shoulder, and all the explanation he condescended to offer for this extraordinary spectacle was—

"Well, aunt, she got tired, so I took her up. I don't think she'll leave me if you ask her," and the eyes glittered wickedly. A few degrees handsomer than the majority was Alex Stewart, and immeasurably better-natured and sweeter-tempered. A great, merry Scotchman, whom Prudence had omitted to make close-fisted, with thick, crisp, reddish hair, moustache and imperial, and a heart that only needed to be appealed to, to tender the deepest and most gentle devotion. A playful word and joke had he with every child in the village, and preferred any day



the outspoken truths of little Fairy, to the proper, well-starched remarks of prudish young ladies.

At last the parting came, and the gigantic orphan went to Bombay, after nearly losing his train endeavouring to comfort Fairy, who had thrown herself down flat on her face in the meadow, in tearless grief.

For days the child refused alike food and comfort, and wandered about with wild eyes and blanched cheeks, followed sorrowfully by their mutual friend "Nell," the water spaniel.

To disturb the harmony there eventually came an order that "Frances should join her sisters in the school-room, and partake of the instruction of Miss Hamilton." Thither Fairy repaired in a condition of infantine mutiny, and declined most stoutly to profit by the advantages offered her.

Three days passed, and then there ensued a court-martial of enquiry, headed by the Rector in Christian wrath and spectacles, and inflated with maxims and precepts all pre-



dicting forcibly the sudden and inevitable destruction of a froward child. But the child under rebuke tossed back her hair, and stated her grievance with quivering lips—

“Papa, they won’t let me have Nell in school.”

“Sir, it is correct, I forbade the dog to come,” announced Miss Hamilton, sedately, “and each morning I have had to send Sam to remove it from under the window, where it persists in sitting and howling.”

“Dear, dear! you don’t say so! Fairy, I am ashamed of you, and you ought to be of yourself, causing so much annoyance to Miss Hamilton.”

“Papa, I *will* be good if Nell may come to school, I won’t pinch Carry, and I won’t dig a pin in Bee. I won’t drop bits of slate-pencil into the ink, and I won’t tie Miss Hamilton to the bell by her neck ribbons, *never* again. Papa, I *won’t*!”

“God bless me! do you mean to say, Miss Hamilton! Madam! Frances!”



The Rector's hair stood on end, and, before it could descend, Nurse put her spoke in the wheel, already revolving, and threatening to crush poor Fairy. She remembered the handsome officer's face, or his half-crowns, for she thawed sufficiently to help the faithful child bereft of her heart's idol—

“If you please, master, and you, marm” (with an antagonistic obeisance towards the governess), “I think Miss Fairy would be good if Nell stayed with her; she feels lonely like without the dog.”

“Humph! is it quiet? I mean, does it lie still, Nurse?”

“Yes, sir, very still, if near Miss Fairy.”

“Then, Miss Hamilton, I will ask you to pamper her fancy, and admit the dog into your sanctum. If the experiment fail, and Fairy be still obstinate, I shall adopt *severe* measures.”

The experiment was tried, and proved a success; Fairy was tractable with her dumb friend by her side, and together they mas-



tered the multiplication table. Only once did the child and dog merit a reproof. Overcome by heat, and the labour of conquering the verb "to be," Fairy fell asleep, and slipped off the stool, with her arms round Nell's neck. Of course Bee must call Miss Hamilton's attention to the circumstance, and that lady must proceed to rouse the drowsy pupil, whereupon Nell showed two rows of strong white tusks in contradiction of that arrangement. And from the other side of the table Miss Hamilton called the child, who apologised so earnestly for her fault, that the governess passed it over unpunished.

Nell was the property of Captain Stewart, and left by him to soothe his little pet. Never was animal so equal to its duty ; it guarded and loved its young mistress as faithfully as its master could have done, and she treated the dog with the utmost trust and affection. Dividing every sweatmeat that was given to her, opening her bedroom door to kiss the waved head that lay on the mat, last thing,



each night, greeting it similarly every morning, lavishing upon it the impetuosity of her wild nature.

Year followed year; Nell and Fairy became the only recipients of Miss Hamilton's instruction, and, ultimately, their education was declared finished. Had Miss Hamilton been asked, she could have told that the silent, brown-faced little maid, was a combination of originality, and sleeping genius; that daily there shot up flowers in that busy brain, from seed *she* had never had a hand in sowing; that her knowledge, her accomplishments, had been born suddenly, their only parent, inspiration. That the treadmill process, necessary with most girls, had never been in operation in this case; that she had but to fix the target for the arrow to spring from the bow, the mark to be hit. In Fairy's hands the old lesson-track lost its ruts and barrenness, her imagination planted green shrubs on the unbroken surface of the highest rocks which lent their shade to screen the



governess from the glare of lassitude. It was this aptitude for gilding what she touched that alienated her from her family; what *they* never felt bruised *her*, making the delicate nature quiver. And if, by ill-luck, one of the grains from her store fell at their feet, it provoked a taunt, or a laugh of scorn. So the girl wandered more alone, courting solitude, and the society of Nell, who, if unable to appreciate her mistress's dreams, at least, did not deride.

But, now Miss Hamilton had gone, "it was ridiculous wasting more money on Fairy, who was so extremely odd, and had the habit of making most awkward observations," and Mrs. Trafford drew her lace mantle over her sloping shoulders. Her eldest daughters were her pride and solace; they sailed about like white swans in the drawing-rooms of the *élite*, and Fairy remained at home, and held a spectral reception in the deserted schoolroom, or rode on the gate, as we have beheld.

They are out to-night at Squire Fletcher's,



whose big son, Harry, great fox-hunting bumpkin, wonders "why on earth that independent little girl, Miss Fairy, did not come, instead of 'the essence of London pride,' who whet their tongues against their mother's stone, and almost take a fellow's head off."

There were a few more who had a painfully pleasant recollection of a rich, swelling, contralto, heard on one occasion in the long drawing-room at the parsonage, whose possessor, after listening silently to the braggings of a young punster, who had not got his pen feathers, was asked why she looked so solemn, and coolly replied—

"I am astonished at your putting such a question to me; 'the mirth of fools inspires melancholy!'"

No one saw the third daughter of the Rector for some time after that, and the splendid tones charmed the spiders in the school-room alone.

Fairy rides on, dreams on, and Nell .



snoozes hard by. The train of thought snaps, and she jerks up her head and addresses the dog—

“Nell, don’t you want your supper? I do. I wonder if there’s any of that cherry tart left. Harriett might let us have it.”

Three raps of concurrence from the bushy tail, and the girl continues—

“I should like to peep into that bilious looking drawing-room at the Fletcher’s, and see the people making asses of themselves, according to their various bents. Arthur Ross, who speaks five languages, will be roaring an Italian song, which might, without any difficulty, be taken for Parsee. After which, that lamp-post of a Miss Welsh will enquire of her vinegared sister, Annette, in a squeaky soprano (as if she kept it in her chignon), ‘Have you seen my Flora pass this way?’ Constance is twining her arms about in nymph-like attitudes, with that gossamer of a Harry standing by her, because his trowsers are so tight he dare not sit down.



Bee is laying down the law with her fan, and annihilating timid Mr. Legge, whom she strikes as being 'a remarkably fine woman.' Mrs. Welsh and mamma are sitting like a couple of trussed turkeys, chattering, till Madam Welsh sings her cockatoo plume of scarlet feather in the candelabra behind, causing a prompt expulsion. We have but one wish that those torpid idiots could grant, have we, Nell? But one desire on their level, despised though we are for our respective inelegance and dogism, and that is, for a few spoonfuls of jelly, and a glass of the champagne those fat wretches drink too much of."



## CHAPTER II.

THE dog listens, and so does a man who has walked over the fields from Steyning Station, and been unnoticed by the dreaming girl on the gate. With his herculean frame drawn up, he stands surveying her through a gap in the hedge.

“By Jove! as bewitching as the name I gave her, artlessly soliloquizing to the spaniel pup that was. I would give six years of my life to have her arms round my neck again, to be her idol now as I was then—Ahem!”

Four orbs clashed immediately. A spring, and the girl stands on *terra firma*, a dash of startled pride curling the ripe lips.

“Sir, I shall be happy to direct you, if you have lost your way.”

“Thank you, kindly, but I believe I am on



the right track. I desire to enter by that gate, and if my vision is to be relied upon, I am exactly opposite to it."

She held it open for him—he hesitated.

"Can you inform me—"

"Excuse me; since your sight is so accurate, allow me to suggest that you follow it, and you will eventually reach the door, where you can propound your inquiries."

"Perhaps I shan't see any one I like so well as yourself when I get there."

"Can't say. But the person who answers it may fancy you—I don't."

An amused laugh from the man.

"I am sorry to find you have the failing of your sex, young lady."

A defiant toss of the pretty rough head.

"Failing! we are credited with so many (and have to thank your kind for *all*) that I shall never hit upon this particular one without your aid. Which may it be?"

"Insincerity."

"Insincerity! if ever any one stood up for



their friends and preferences, *I* do. You must be a raving lunatic !”

“Hardly; but I am your superior in memory and sincerity. I recollect a little girl who promised to love and remember me for ever; I still love her, and now she says she does not like me. Fairy, is it *true* ?”

“O, no; no! Alex, dear Alex, I am so sorry, but I did not know you under that hat. Aunt John said my tongue would make my heart ache.”

Dignity, pride, all was forgotten; she lay sobbing passionately, like a child, on his breast, the short arms clasped round his neck fondly. Her heart was wounded to the core at the seeming unfaithfulness evinced by the sharp tongue, and her regret was as sincere as if the injury had been real.

“Hush, Fairy! or I verily believe I shall cry too. I know you did not mean to hurt me. Kiss me, darling !”

The wet, pale face was lifted.



"Alex, if I had known it was *you*!"

"What would you have done? rushed towards me with open arms?"

"No, I should have hidden myself somewhere out of sight."

"Why?"

"Because I am silly. When I feel here, and here (placing a hand on head and heart) I can't remember to behave."

"Then who sustains the family reputation?"

"Con and Bee; but I don't often feel, so I manage."

"Why don't you feel?"

"Because they have no real feeling for me. They snub me, Alex, make fun of my brown skin and round figure, call me dumpy and stupid. And I hate and despise them for their hypocrisy. Con gets up her attitudes, expressions of joy or sorrow, before the glass, and Bee cribs all her speeches from 'The Lady's Pioneer Through Life.' Mamma is delighted to see they have so much tact, and poor papa is so silly, they cheat him right and left."



"What a charming arrangement! Where are they now?"

"At dinner with the Fletchers. But I forgot. I am hungry. Come in!"

In the hall they met a servant.

"The tray's in the schoolroom, Miss Fairy."

"Very well, Alice. Ask Harriet to send something nice; Captain Stewart has come."

A crash in the kitchen, and therefrom issued Harriet.

"Well, so it is, sure enough. Welcome home, sir. The supper had best be served in the dining-room."

"No, no," called the laughing Captain, "I am Miss Fairy's guest, and shall go into the school-room."

"I suppose you are as secure from intrusion here as a monk in his cell?" asked the bronzed cousin, throwing himself into Miss Hamilton's deserted chair, and nearly bringing the whole structure to the ground.

"Yes, Nell and I divide the desolation between us."



"Fairy, I thought you said you were hungry?"

"And so I felt before I saw you; you have taken my appetite away."

"Shouldn't think you found tart very appetising. Will it take the place of cold pudding, and settle your love?"

"I am not in love, I am not nice enough for any one to care about. If I were, and guessed that pudding would kill it, I should never have sufficient, so anxious would I be to get rid of such rubbish."

"Well, love is rubbish. There is no true love in the world, Fairy; it is like electro, rapidly rubs off."

The fine eyes studied his face earnestly for a second.

"Alex, you are a donkey to propound a doctrine you don't believe. There is love in every one if they would only leave it alone, and not smother it by acting. They pretend to be what they are not, put on a false nature, and get proposed to by the wrong man."



"Fairy, what do you know of such things?"

"Something that's not pleasant, but correct.

At this moment Bee is making love to Mr. Legge on mamma's wits. If I get the chance I'll tell him, and spare him the shock of discovery when it's too late to retract."

The Captain roared again.

"Fairy, you are a lovable little spitfire. Go on, your ideas are refreshing. Do you propose spending your life here, most gifted magician, or marrying for love, and living on air?"

"The magician will consult the stars that tell her future."

The small hand executed some mystic signs in the air with a fork.

"They say: 'A tolerable portion of common sense has been allotted to our daughter Fairy, and circumstances have prevented self-conceit from overpowering it. Reason has put a bit in the jaws of inclination, judgment holds the reins. On the heels of temptation will follow undying conscience. Prudence



shall conquer to-day what might blast to-morrow. Truth must fight to the death every lie, and honesty and firmness of purpose direct the life.' ”

The girl bent forward.

“ Do you think it will be a propitious one ? ”

Alexander Stewart breathed heavily, all levity had deserted him ; the fineness of perception, the clear judgment betrayed by Fairy possessed him with a sense of her superiority. That exactness of calculation, of balancing the actual with the possible, the finely-marked career, with each weak point guarded, seemed fitted for a wider range than the intellect of a girl of sixteen.

“ Fairy, your brain has stolen a march upon you ! And it is to eat and drink at fashionable tables that they leave you to the companionship of your own thoughts, and a dismal school-room. Fools ! ” He propped both elbows on the table, gnawing his moustache. “ You don't care to go out, you don't care for society ? Why so ? ”



“From an existing lack of sympathy.”

“Child, it is ill; you are young, bright, you *must* care; some one must take the trouble to make you.”

“Ha! ha! If I could feel an interest in dumb men and women, like children do in toys, I should care. But I cannot. When they speak, it is about something I have no feeling for, hardly any knowledge of. I hunger and long here day after day, powerless to express my want; if necessity has invented strange food to feed me with, whose fault is that? I cannot listen to what leaves no echo in my ear, I cannot love what comes not nigh my heart. Alex, did you bewitch me when I was a child?”

“I scarcely think you ever were one, simple, strong, loving heart always. There! I must have a care, else in a weak moment I shall utter words that will blister my tongue. Call your spell off me, bonnie witch! or I shall open my heart and take you in!”

He drew her close in a fierce embrace, then



started up, and commenced pacing the room. The moon rode high; a cockchafer chirped in the long grass, and a moth flew in at the open window, and flirted with the lamp till dizzy, scorched, it dropped amongst the dishes. Then the girl rose, and seating herself at the piano began to sing in rich, wild tones, making the man smoking by the window tremble like a child. Still the flood of melody rolled on, leading to her feet captive, bound with chains of enchantment, him who hearkened.

- “Fairy, have mercy! prolong not this delirium further; stop ere my reason flies for ever!”

He had dissolved the spell, the possession had fled. She started up bewildered, amused, unconscious of her power.

A pause; then her cousin spoke composedly—

“How many times have you sung before people?”

“Only once; mamma had a large party, and there was no room for me at table, Con



said, but I crept into the drawing-room after dinner, and some one asked for 'Auld Robin Gray.' Papa said I could sing it, and I did, and others after. But would you believe it? some of them actually cried, and mamma said I had no right to sing such melancholy things, they were not suitable for a drawing-room, and she would never allow me to make such an exhibition again. I don't think those old purple-faced men ever heard a note, they were half stupid, sitting an hour over papa's port."

"But you sing sometimes, don't you?"

"No; I give a concert, like to-night, when there's no one at home. Please don't say you heard me, Alex! Con says I remind her of a street singer, Bee declares I am the ditto of Shute, the ugliest man in the parish."

"What d—d impudence! Have you ever heard of jealousy, Fairy?"

"Yes, but only in an ill-conditioned mind. I overheard Charles Farquhar tell Miss Cobbett there was no real love without jealousy, and I



concluded he was incapable of feeling anything, seeing he knew not the power of faith."

"How much faith have you, child?"

"I never measured it, but every doubt and difficulty that can pass my judgment, shall be supported by faith."

"What do you suppose begets unhappiness?"

"Inequality, discontent, and a want of confidence in either one's course or companion. A person blindfolded always walks timidly."

"Inequality!"

"Yes, a sense of inferiority either real or imaginary, possibly arising from the position of a family, the magnitude of a purse, or the right of superior talents."

"And how would you choose to stand with your husband?"

"Level. Nothing to envy, nothing to hate."

"Good. You are wise beyond the average, and, in my opinion, stand a better chance of getting your measure full of happiness."

The Captain pushed his broad shoulders through the casement, and puffed on medita-



tively. The girl thought with a curious smile on her face, half contentment, half mischief, and presently slid her little hand into his.

"Now you are here, Alex, I shan't be shy or lonely any more. Maybe I shall improve under your guidance!"

He turned and caught the pretty chin in his hand, lifting the face upwards.

"Fairy, I am not such a conceited fellow, but that I can perceive and own that you can teach me many things. If you will be patient, my darling, I may be a credit to some one."

The rosy lips parted, showing the glistening teeth.

"Nonsense! I know nothing to teach; how should I, penned up here?"

"Yes, you do. Your quiet life has fostered reflection, a search for cause to account for result. You have secured the root, where many are contented to pluck the flower and pass by. Their blossom will wither, your root will live, bear fresh flowers, and only perish with you. You don't know anything! 'The



wise man knows nothing, the fool everything.'"

The crunching of wheels startled the sleeping birds, silenced the nightingale in the grove, and hurried the bats to their holes in the thatched summer-house.

"The revellers have returned. Wonder what they will say to me! Come, Fairy!"

He vaulted on to the grass, and putting one arm round the small lady in blue, whisked her out, too. There were no more windows to be surmounted, yet the arm that had done such good service retained its position, and the girl nestled near to the soldier with that perfect confidence which, in the mind of an honourable man, renders her sacred above all others. It is a wise woman who never forgets that her helplessness is her greatest charm.

The big waggonette (with its bonnet on) crawled up to the door, the birds of Paradise hopped out. Stagefied exclamations, hysterical cadences, and the Captain laughing ironically, shook himself free.



"I am not strong enough to be embraced by two at once. What Amazons you are! they ought to enrol you in the county police!"

A chromatic scale, known in polite society as a laugh, from the tall virgins.

"How funny you are, cousin Alex!"

"Funny! you have misunderstood me completely. My speech (awkwardly framed, no doubt) was intended to express admiration."

A cackle of satisfaction from the old hen.

"You must not flatter, Alex" (tapping him with her fan), "*that* is too general to find appreciation with my girls. Fairy, *you* here!"

The arm round Fairy tightened.

"My dear aunt, Fairy promises to rival you in the capacity of hostess. She has profited so well by your accomplished example, that the minutes have sped on phantom wings since I had the fortune to land here."

"Ah! She always was at home with you, peculiar child! But I think it is cool now."

"Decidedly; and I fear, like you, for this pair of doves. Seek your nests, fair Bee and



Con ! should you cough to-morrow, I shall be distracted."

"Alex," whispered a low voice from the third button of his waistcoat, "let me go !"

"No," pushing her behind him.

"Go, my loves," reiterated their mother.

"Fairy, follow your sisters."

"She has preceded them, madam. Obedient child ! she departed at your first hinted desire, and disappeared by the side door. You, aunt, are the only one in danger now."

"Indeed ! then I will say good night. Alex, you will join your uncle in his study ?"

Exit aunt.

"O, Alex !" gasped Fairy to the laughing man, who stooped to her, squeezed into the corner of the porch under the syringa, "How could you ?"

"How could I what ? tell such a fib ? I wish I had always had so good an excuse for telling one. What are you trembling about ?"

"I feared lest mamma should find me here, and you out in a story."



"There! that unfortunate cram will rankle ever so long in your clear conscience. Well, well! you must teach me better, or they must leave us alone. Let us go into the garden, I will put you in again through the school-room window."

A stifled cry of pain from the child.

"My hair has caught."

Though his hands were stabbed in a hundred places with the rose-thorns that mingled there, he uttered no cry, but tenderly extricated the curling mass from the web it was in.

"Now we may go. One fact is reliable: your hair is your own, else it would have remained on that bough, and given evidence against us in the morning. But I jammed you in ruthlessly; did I hurt you?"

"No."

Skirting the flower-beds, he led her to a narrow walk called "The Grove," on account of a row of old birch and fir trees that fenced it from the garden on one side, while the river performed that service on the other. Across



stretched the meadows, with their footpath to Steyning.

“Now I don’t fancy either of those stilted sisters of yours will be able to see us down here, however they crane their long necks. Fancy having one of those muscular madams slung round one’s neck for ever. Heaven defend the poor fellow! there could only be two things left for him to do—die or bolt.”

“Alex, do you know they are universally admired, especially at balls?”

“By a generation of pigmies, yes! but I would just as soon undertake to waltz with one of those poplars, as with Con. How do you like balls, Fairy?”

“I have never been to one; mamma says she does not like to take more than two. But I can picture it, and I don’t fancy I should enjoy myself amongst so many. They think very much about them here, though; all the girls go, and talk of nothing else. They imagine nothing but a public ball can bring them (what is it they term it?) ‘out’!”



“Yes! ha, ha! that’s the expression, ‘out!’ it’s a decent manner of offering them for sale, and they dress as sparingly as modesty will permit. I don’t think you would enjoy yourself, you are not a ball-going young lady. I am sure I should not like to see you there.”

“You have been?”

“Dozens of times, but I never found the girl there whom I could esteem—I have admired plenty. Child, *you* were never meant to singe your wings in the gaslight; the mixed, fevered air of a ball-room would not keep that head so clear, that little hand so cool. Kiss me, darling; say again you are glad to have me home, seal my lips to patience by the pure, loyal touch of yours!”



## CHAPTER III.

ALEXANDER STEWART, having no home and few relations, made his English head-quarters at the dull Rectory. By dint of contrivance, he maintained perfect harmony with the household, and spent three-parts of his time in the schoolroom, pleading his necessity, from habit, for smoking, and his uncle's well-remembered dislike to the same. His fair cousins—who deemed it the duty of one to get up a scene, and make love to him—sued for an entrance. But he related such thrilling stories of ruined complexions, &c., that they thought better of it.

“Hang it all ! I’ll fetch a baboon from town the next time I go up, and chain it to the handle of the door, if they keep on this foolery,” declared he to Fairy, who sat fixing a new hook to his fishing-rod near the window ;



"what idiots they are not to see we don't want them!"

"Ah! they don't consider *me* in the matter!"

"Then I do. Why, Fairy, you creep into the darkest corner of the room when they come, and if it were not for an occasional twitch of that short lip, or a wicked glance, I should fancy your spirit had taken flight to that dreamland it loves to wander in. No, no! I'll not have them bearing down upon us!"

Silently Fairy congratulated herself on his determination; her life was supremely happy with Alex to fight her battles, and the idea of drifting back to her stranded, forlorn position of old, brought the tender heart to a sudden standstill. That pretty little performance of a stolen moonlight ramble, and a lift through the schoolroom window enacted the first night had many encores.

Mrs. Trafford remarked to her nephew one day—

"You find Fairy a complete tom-boy, do you not? It is very kind of you to accommo-



date your conversation to her understanding. If you *could* persuade her to talk of something different from birds, rabbits, dogs, and fishing, I *should* be grateful. Her mind is so very unformed that her sisters find it impossible to converse upon any refined subject with her."

Something of importance occurred to the toe of the Captain's boot, requiring minute inspection, but what occasioned the smile, showing every white tooth in his head, was a mystery. Perhaps it was an elegant spasm of agony?

"Yes, yes, quite correct. Fairy is a walking Natural History, we hold many interesting discussions as to the habits of creatures here and abroad. I admire her simplicity, aunt. She is a charming child!"

When the lady had gone, her nephew lay back in the chair and laughed heartily.

"If they only knew! if some one could only hear the ideas of the 'unformed mind!' how the tables would revolve! One word of hers is worth more than their babble for a



month. So she only treats them to animal conversation, and they fancy that her one groove ! I have noticed it, she regards them (had they wit enough to discern it) as overgrown babies, and cleverly guards against any topic likely to be productive of a rupture. Why does she so unceasingly conceal her real character ? I wonder are all such natures so timid and secretive ?”

“Boscobel, near Steyning. A Rural Fête and Fancy Bazaar, will be held in the picturesque gardens of the Rectory, Boscobel (by kind permission of the Rector, the Rev. Robert Trafford, M.A.), on Thursday, August 16th, and Friday, August 17th, 1874, from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m., in aid of funds for purchasing an organ for Boscobel Church. A band of music will attend. Contributions of needlework, fruit and flowers will be gratefully received by the Misses Trafford, and can be sent to Steyning Station.”



Such was the announcement that disfigured the countenance of every barn-door and gate-stump in the neighbourhood. Bee and Con had worried and worried till they carried their point, much to the disgust of Fairy and the soldier-cousin, who hated displays of any sort. He proposed to Fairy that they should go to town or to Brighton, but upon her refusing on the grounds of the fuss mamma would make, he agreed to remain and see that those swans, Con and Bee, did not pluck her to pieces in envious rage.

“Don’t flirt with any of their appropriated swains, else I won’t answer for the consequences.”

The excitement had reached its last endurable pitch on the eventful morning, and the sun, determined not to be outdone, put on double pressure, and steeped the land in molten gold!

“Whew! this is terrible!” exclaimed the officer, preparing to take a “brandy and soda” — “never felt the heat more in Bombay. Fairy, come here!” as a light step crossed the hall.



"How did you know it was me?" asked she, responding to the call.

He smiled.

"Drink!" commanded he, holding the big glass to her lips, and eyeing her complacently the while.

Many a grander, more beautiful picture, yes! but scarce a sweeter one. It is not always that the greatest beauty leaves the pleasantest recollection in the memory of the beholder. Clad in a quaker-like dress of mauve muslin, high bodice, long sleeves, black velvet bands clasping arms, neck and waist, she looked a striking specimen of modest intelligence. Not a single ornament had she on, she did not possess one, and yet it occurred to the man regarding her that this quaker-robed maiden was sure to attract attention, and take root in the minds of all. There was a powerful fascination in the quiet, indifferent gaze of the searching eye, the equilibrium of which no other orb had force to shake, suggestive of an under-current of thought, rich



and humourous, if only attainable. But of those who might try, how many would succeed? Few; the rest would depart, chilled by the icy ease of manner, and visible carelessness as to their impression or opinion, believing her to be callous, soulless. Some well-wishers and admirers might have chafed under the possibility of their favourite getting misjudged. Not so, Alex Stewart; he hugged himself, greedily glad that he alone possessed the master key to that inner heart, stuck his hands in his pockets, and whistled "Tapioca."

"Are you going to the tent now, Fairy?"

"In a few moments. Papa has sent me to find the key for the musical box, Mrs. Annaly sent for mamma's stall, and Bee has mislaid it. You go on, I will follow directly."

"I dare say, and arrive there a thoughtless being, having left them all with you."

"You need not speak, only stand to be admired and bowed down to; it is what you men like most."

"Impudent witch! don't tempt me. Be off!"



"Here it is!" exclaimed she, after an absence of ten minutes.

"Fairy, there is something the matter; what is it?"

"Nothing."

"Now don't put off, confess at once, else I shall immediately proceed to the room you have left, and rummage it through."

"Alex, it is no affair of ours."

"It is mine, since it's yours. Come!"

"Constance paints."

"Paints what?"

"Her face."

"You don't say so! pretty that, for a parson's daughter! How do you know?"

"I have seen the pot of stuff. Leaves like the Chinese ladies use. You rub the leaf gently on your cheek, and it defies either detection or water, you can't wash it off for days. I should like to throw the vile mockery into the fire; to think that she kneels to pray, goes to church, a living lie! Surely such artifices need not creep into the life of a young



girl. She might be generous enough to leave such customs to those who have no other resource!"

"Don't take it to heart, darling; I dare say Bee uses a cosmetic to whiten her skin. And if so, your sisters are only following the example set by fashion; they are not alone, by many hundreds. You are the odd one, you are scrupulous, Fairy, but not too much so, I cannot say that. Only keep as you are, never heed your face, your heart is the right complexion."

The tent was crammed, likewise the grounds. Fashionable people from Brighton fairly raked the flowers out of the beds, sweeping their costly trains negligently over them. The Captain and his companion stationed themselves in a position commanding a good view of the tent.

"Now, Fairy, enlighten me. Who is that long lady in black, with every scrap of hair combed over a bolster *à la* queen Elizabeth, and a Ruben's hat stuck on the top of that?"



“That is Mrs. Hubert Randolph. She is so clever that, before her marriage, she rose at five in the morning to study Greek, which has so bewildered her, that now you can scarcely read what she writes in her own language. She always dresses in black, because she considers it ‘so *gen-teel*,’ and, when a present is made to her child, calls and leaves her thanks with the maid on the door-step. That is her husband, that big, blustering fellow. Look! she is in an agony lest he should say or do something not ‘*gen-teel*.’ I imagine their cup of happiness to be full to the brim. They claw each other in private, and she talks of her ‘good man’ in public.”

“What bliss! Who is that girl in the papery blue silk, and the brass jewellery?”

“Miss Cobbett—she has never heard the word self-disapprobation. Their barn of a Hall is to cover a multitude of faults, and those false plaits her bump of curiosity. That pompous young donkey there is her brother



who, upon the strength of being articulated to a lawyer, talks about 'my clients.'"

"And that little dark fellow talking to Bee?"

"Mr. Paterson, the most witty and gentlemanly of men. He describes the berth allotted to him during a voyage, thus: 'Suppose we say a sausage roll! imagine yourself the sausage, and the bed clothes the paste!'"

"A capital simile indeed! I should like to make his acquaintance. Stay! stay! I want you! The name of that tall man and little woman just entering?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Sutton. Mr. Sutton has a singular aptitude for uttering the coarsest remarks, and his wife, who is terribly jealous of him, 'God blesses' her wretch of a parrot."

"They ought to keep a menagerie. Satisfy my curiosity once more, and then we will toddle. Who is that wild-looking individual, grimacing to tragic Bee?"

"Herr Myer, an artist; he comes here in the summer for sketching. Rather taken with



Bee, I fancy—he is most amusing. Last year he had a great white dog that he never could manage, it was always running away from him; so at last he told us he had got quit of the beast. ‘He have chased the sheepses, taken meat from another man’s hand, and shawed me his tail.’ When mamma had that bad finger, he deemed himself the pink of politeness by inquiring: ‘Well, and how’s your malardy?’ But the best of all is a letter he wrote mamma the other day, asking her permission ‘to call on a door where he have many happy memories, and where he have pass away many times lately, not daring, but now his reserveness of manner, which was natural to him from the *styl* he was brought up have gone off, and make him fall out, from his solitude, &c., &c., moreover, his fader, after a short illness, have lately *did*.’”

A burst of laughter from Alex stopped Fairy, and, unable to control himself, he dashed out of the tent, dragging her with him, much to Miss Cobbett’s horror, her



narrow notion of politeness not being wide enough to admit such a proceeding. Under a tree he stopped to laugh again.

“Fairy, I shall never trust myself with you in future, your tongue lashes right and left. People will think worse of me than ever, now.”

“Perhaps, and I don’t believe you care any more about that than I do.”

Finding little pleasure in any society save their own, they seated themselves by the river, perfectly contented with the present. Stroking the smooth water with a willow twig, the man pondered over something that blanched the bronzed cheek and rendered the strong hand so nerveless, that the twig escaped and floated down the stream, showing which way the current leaned. Its course ran so stealthily, so imperceptibly, that, like many a life, few knew its real direction till some care was placed upon its bosom, till the fate of another bespoke it, for good or ill.

“Fairy, how far have your thoughts strayed into our future?”



“Since you came, I have been too happy to think !”

“Ah ! but to the brightest day there comes an ending, into every life a lock. You saw that willow escape from my grasp, and pass on ? Now, it remains with the river to decide its future, whether it reaches land again, or tosses on, on, and makes one of many that are lodged in the mud and pebbles below.”

The girl mused, and then brightly replied—

“Why should the river abuse the twig’s confidence and drag it down ? It promises fairly enough to invite trust. These sticks, leaves, rushes, make its beauty ; rob it of them, and it would be little prettier than a canal running through a town. No one should throw away an ally, however unpretending.”

“Then you think the river would be silly and unjust to quarrel with that twig ?”

“Yes.”

“You consider the advantage to be derived mutual ?”

“I do. The willow could not voyage with-



out the river, the river would not look so well without the bough."

"True, Fairy! shall we cast in our lots together, since we please, and, I believe, are necessary to each other? I am a lonely, selfish fellow, beautiless without you; you are fretting, pining, at a standstill in your family cage, joyless without me. Do I say right?"

"Perfectly. They care nothing for me, are you sure *you* do?"

"Ah! you want, womanlike, to exercise your authority at once, and *count* my affection. But you could not. It is countless as the sands of the ocean, it will come freshly each year. I swear" (lifting his hat) "here, near your father's home, surrounded by our Father's care and gifts, to love and keep you—He being willing—to the last minute of my life, and revere you next to my God."

"Why don't you feign astonishment and blush, darling?" asked he, releasing her from a close embrace.

"Because I seem to have been prepared by



instinct, unconsciously to myself, for this declaration, and I cannot get up any pretty affectation, Alex. But fancy being with you always, going over to that scorching land, and seeing your brother officers. They will say : ‘ What an ass Stewart was to marry that little nigger !’ Alex, we can never walk arm in arm, because my head only reaches your elbow ; I must trot along, holding your hand. O dear ! I shall be, I am, in great danger !”

He secured both hands in one of his, and, laughingly, demanded—“ What of ?”

“ Of loving you too dearly,” retorted the child, the first spark of tender feeling flashing from the eyes that promised a lifetime of sincerity. “ Alex, you are as necessary to me as the rocks are to the earth. You are my foundation ; my life can only be built upon your companionship or—memory. If I lose you, the remembrance of what you were to me, what you would have had me be to you, shall uphold, and cheer me on. Our love shall



purify my life. If passed together, it will be a cloudless one with a golden sunset. Alex, kiss me, and don't go away after they know?"

She stretched up her arms round his neck, the childlike action could not be superseded by any maidenish mode. But no lukewarm embrace would have satisfied the hunger of his great love. It is such affection, full grown at its birth, born at the spring of each soul, acknowledging a similarity, experiencing a consciousness of right in its dictates, that sweeps down all usurpers, and rides sure-footed over a lifetime.

"I won't leave you, sweet one, for fear you shut yourself up in the coal-cellar, or blush yourself to death. I shall 'ask papa' when the bazaar is over, and then—

"The arrow to the quiver  
And the wild bird to the tree;  
The stream to meet the river  
And the river to the sea.  
The waves are wedded on the beach,  
The shadows on the lea;  
And like to like, and each to each,  
And I to thee."



## CHAPTER IV.

HAD a shell exploded in the Rectory, the shock could not have been greater than the one administered by the collected officer, who composedly asked the consent of his uncle and aunt to the marriage of himself with their daughter Frances.

"Fairy! that shy, awkward girl! Impossible, Alexander!" stuttered the Rector, looking over his glasses. "I disapprove of cousins marrying. They are always one of four things: Healthless, wealthless, senseless or childless!"

Alexander smiled.

"Indeed! it requires some time to decide which of the four it's to be, and the interval might be a very happy one. If Fairy is agreeable to run the risk, I am."



"But the disparity in age is a consideration," suggested the father.

Here his wife begged to differ from "dear Robert."

"Fairy is so extremely backward, that you will have to form her mind, Alex."

"That I never shall, aunt. It is because she is endowed with such superior mental powers that you fail to understand her. Excuse me, but, figuratively speaking, she looks down on you all. You had better let me have her before she shoots out of your sight. Form her mind! No, no! I'll never take such a fallacy to my bosom to have it recoil and sting me. I only knew one man—a self-made gentleman—who married with that intention, and his wife repaid his gratuitous instruction by taking to the brandy-bottle, and sinking every witshe had in it. The women blamed *her*, but every man who wasn't a cur blamed *him*."

The question of Bombay suiting Fairy's constitution was next mooted. And in this they all agreed—it would not.



“What shall you do?”

“Give up my appointment, sir, and settle in England!”

So the last obstacle was knocked down, and they were formally engaged. But so little like a betrothed young lady did Fairy behave—racing with the dogs, climbing trees, digging for worms to bait their lines with, helping old Sam to gather apples, till Alex one day caught her, and in a terrible fright lifted her off the ladder, and made her promise *never* to do it again—that but for the big diamond ring on one supple finger, it might have passed for a dream.

“It’s no use,” declared this little lady, tossing back the wavy hair from the happy face, “I am a wild thing, I shall never be tame. I love the wind best, I admire it most, because it’s free, it can’t be caught and kept; chase it, and it’s gone directly. I’ve a nervous notion that something dreary would happen to *me* if I had to mince my manners and behave prettily all day. Alex, *don’t* try to



make me ! if you want a steady wife, go and ask Bee or Con."

"I want you, just as you are, wild, provoking elf ! I want no cold, fine madam with a heart like the frigid zone, I want a bright, impulsive wife who teases and nettles me into falling in love with her anew each day, whose tongue chafes, that her lips may heal. Pretty wild bird, your natural notes are the sweetest ; a taught song would be no music to me. You've a heart and a will strong and free ; conventionality has not warped you, customs will never cage you. To squeeze you into the gauge set for the generality, would be to crush the habitation and release the spirit that scorns a tether, defies a tutor. Fly whither thou listest, but not far from me !"

A fresh, breezy March morning ; clear sunbeams slanting through the trees, bidding the timid early flowers hold up their pretty heads, and not be vanquished by the quantity of hot-house belles congregated within the parsonage. There is some one who never forgets old and



constant friends. She who has sung her last song for many months to the piano that heard her first scale, whose hands have filled the cracked celery-glass with spring flowers, and set it in the school-room window. She who, arrayed in grey dress, sable jacket and blue bonnet, is being waited for by the group in the hall.

"Fairy, Fairy!" calls the newly-made husband.

"Coming," responds she, appearing with the excited spaniel.

"Alex, do you know I found her shut up in the wood-shed. I wonder who did it?"

"I did, ma'am, she wanted to follow you to church," said Alice.

"Come, my dear, say good-by to your dog, we shall miss our train."

"Good-by! why, Alex, I could not go without Nell—*how* can you propose such a thing? Leave Nell, my old friend, for *four* months! Impossible! both would never survive the separation!"



A laugh from Captain Stewart, a look of consternation from the rest.

“Dear, dear ! Frances, you must part from such childish whims, and consider yourself a woman now.”

“ So I do, papa, and one of *great* importance, to have you all so civil, dancing attendance upon me. Good-by ; jump in, Nell !”

And away they drove, through a shower of cheers, bouquets and old slippers. Shall we say—

“ God speed them ?”

THE END.



